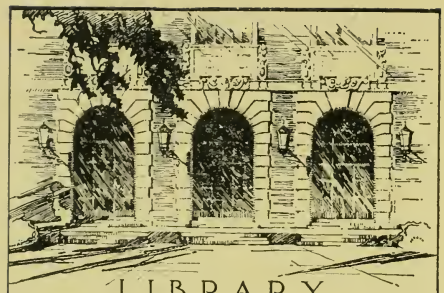

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MARJORY:

A Study.

MARJORY:

A STUDY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "JAMES GORDON'S WIFE."

— Do not fear to hope! Can poet's brain
More than the father's heart rich good invent?
* * * * * *
Be bounteous in thy faith, for not misspent
Is confidence unto the Father lent.
GEORGE MACDONALD.

VOLUME I.

LONDON:
WYMAN & SONS, 74–75, GREAT QUEEN STREET,
LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS.
1880.

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GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS,
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MARJORY.

CHAPTER I.

"Wheresoe'er I am by night and day,
All earth and air seem only burning fire."
Tennyson.

THERE had been no rain for many weeks. Day after day the sky lay in the same blue calm—deep blue far above, blue haze near the horizon. Would it ever rain again, one might wonder? Would ever again come a day or night when soft showers might be heard soaking down, refreshing the parched ground, the dusty trees, the flowers, now dry and drooping? Still less conceivable, would wintry tempests ever revisit the earth—the drenching rains, when all the heavens are black, when the sun seems angry,—cold rains, rains pelting against the windows, flooding the rivers, universalising mud and discomfort? Would there ever again be anything but aridness and scorching summer?

Even in the country, among woods and lanes, existence was burdensome. The cows stood motionless for hours in the ponds; the roads were ankle-deep in dust, dust lay thick on the hedges, making the honeysuckle dingy, powdering the wild roses. Even there dogs panted, and lay about with hanging tongues; flies were a weariness to man and beast; birds, from sunrise to sunset, ceased to sing; the sun embrowned the grass, and dried the brooks, and reigned with steady power.

But in towns, far from greenness and freshness, the heat amounted to suffering. Doors and windows, open to their utmost extent, admitted no breath of air; the sun beat on the white pavements, on the roofs; even the shady side of the street was hardly bearable. And still above all, above the chimneys, the smoke, the wearied and oppressed men and women,the calm sky stretched and smiled, like some vast existence of strength and beauty, which cannot sympathise with pain, because to it pain is unknown. There was no relief, no escaping from the eternal glare. One felt this especially in the outskirts at the new end of the town, among roads no less dusty than the country roads, but bordered by red brick

instead of trees. Here no shelter of any kind was possible, unless one's own umbrella.

Red-brick rows of small houses, cottages rather—only nothing in their appearance suggested that picturesque name. Row after row, facing, at right angles, back to back; little shops, hucksters, small grocers' and the like; public-houses; a Baptist chapel with a bare-faced gable, containing one plain window like a great inquisitive eye; "Laburnum," "Arbutus," and other "Villas," standing in little gardens, each with a straight path leading to an uninteresting green door; genteel Academies for young ladies, an Educational Establishment for young gentlemen—all of red brick, without embellishment or disguise, staring, glaring, baking in the sun; a stunted lilac or laburnum tree here and there; a pillar-post; rows of windows, wherein crochet antimacassars drooped elegantly from the backs of looking-glasses; a church innocent of architecture, with a large round clock gazing from a triangular edifice, founded on the idea of a steeple. Branksome, this growing offshoot of the cathedral city of Alton, formed as strange a contrast to the opposite end of the town as existed between the clock-faced church and the glorious cathedral itself.

One might almost wonder that the clock in question, presenting so unsheltered a front to the sun, should have strength to remain at its post, still less, with a harsh voice, to send forth twelve strokes into the broiling atmosphere. This, however, it had just done; and as the last stroke died away in clanging vibration, an open fly, driven by a red-faced man, apparently on the point of solution, went at a foot's pace past the church, and turned into one of the new streets in front of a little house, standing in a little garden. The red-faced man climbed slowly from his box, walked slowly up the short pathway, and rang the bell. The door was open; and as he waited, mopping his red face with a yellow handkerchief, he could see a tiny hall floored with oilcloth, and a steep little staircase, similarly covered, mounting to the upper story. Presently footsteps and a bumping were heard, and a female voice shrieked, "Here, young man! lend a hand to this, if you please." At the same moment, a travelling-box, neatly corded, appeared with a sudden thump on the topmost stair—held back from precipitate descent by the brawny hands of an elderly woman in a black cap trimmed with corn-flowers.

The driver deposited his handkerchief in the crown of his hat, and went to her assistance. As he did so, he saw in the background a little girl, carrying—flushed and panting with the effort—a heavy carpet-bag. There must have been something in her face—certainly there was nothing in her dress—which caused the red-faced man to touch his hat to this child; and, the box deposited in the fly, he hurried back, despite that process of solution, to relieve her. She had just laboriously reached the foot of the stairs; when the man, touching his hat again, proceeded to shoulder the bag, the child thanked him by a smile which made her whole face shine—then turned and ran upstairs again, as quickly as if it were November instead of July, and the little house heated through and through.

The driver returned to the gate, passing the black-capped woman. During her absence a baby had been screaming in some obscure background; the woman hurried in, and the screams ceased; all was silence. The man sat down upon the floor of his vehicle, his feet on the step, and waited. The patient horse stood spiritless, while the flies buzzed round his downcast head. A man with a

barrel-organ came round the corner, and paused in the road beside the fly, and played a droning air; a baker's boy, with an empty basket on his shoulder, stopped to listen; the blue vault rose above—the road baked visibly—the red-brick houses with their open windows stood and stared; the driver was on the point of a doze, and started when some one spoke to him.

It was the little girl, an old straw hat upon her head, her arms full of wraps and loose luggage.

"Please, driver," she said in an old-fashioned manner, "can you put up the hood of your carriage? Aunt Lucy has been very ill, and the sun might be too much for her. And you'd better do it at once, please, because they are late, and I'm afraid of their missing the train."

The driver rose forthwith; the child's energy was infectious. While he put up the hood, she mounted into the fly, and arranged her load—a light shawl, a cushion, a travelling-bag, a book, a parcel. Then, jumping down with an evident pleasure in the action, which proved her still a child, despite her thoughtful ways, she ran back to the house, crying, "Uncle John! Uncle John! come, or you'll miss the train!"

A minute later a gentleman and lady came slowly down the path. The gentleman was about forty years of age, thin, and of an anxious countenance, his hair sprinkled with gray. The best days of his clerical black were evidently long over, yet no one could doubt him to be a gentleman in reality as in name. And the lady, leaning on his arm, looked "every inch" a lady, although her garments also were well worn and not of the newest fashion. She was some years younger than her husband, and had the remains of great beauty, but sickness and anxiety had stamped their traces on cheek and brow—the one was too thin, the other had lost its smoothness. Nevertheless, she was lovely still, and the tender care with which her husband assisted her to the humble vehicle at the gate had in it something of masculine homage to beauty, as well as of unselfish devotion to a sick wife. She seemed to depend upon him as a child upon a parent; she was a little helpless, accustomed to be waited on, shielded, cherished. Her husband half lifted her into the fly, holding a large umbrella over her head the while; and the little girl sprang after to make her comfortable, to cover her muslin dress with

the shawl, and adjust the cushion at her back.

"Good-bye, darling, I hope you will not feel lonely," said the invalid, drawing the child's face down to hers, and kissing it anxiously.

"Aunt Lucy, may I go some nice long walks?" whispered the little girl, winking hard to keep back two troublesome tears.

"My darling, I don't see—Mrs. Hammond couldn't spare time to take you," said Aunt Lucy, irresolute and perplexed, glancing questioningly at her husband.

"What's that? Marjory pining for walks? in this weather?" said the clergyman.

"It's cooler sometimes. Please let me. By myself, I mean; I won't do anything naughty. There's such a nice road past the church, leading into the country. Do let me! I'll be so good, indeed."

"Well, I know we can trust you; I see no objection to some country walks, now and then. Not in the town, mind; I can't have you go alone into the town."

"Oh, no, Uncle John, I'm tired of the town, I want the country. Thank you. Good-bye."

She raised her face for a final kiss, and

sprang out once more; the driver mounted to his box, and away rolled the fly. Marjory stood on the pathway, watching, till it had disappeared. Then she walked slowly back into the little house, and turned into a small sitting-room on the ground-floor, the door of which stood open.

She was winking harder than before; the tears were coming back, and she must not give way to them. At any minute Mrs. Hammond, the black-capped landlady, might enter, and she would not for the world be seen crying. She went to the window, facing the road, and stood there, looking out. The little sitting-room was furnished with sordid plainness. It had a horsehair sofa, an arm-chair of American leather, a portrait of the Queen in a black frame, a square centre-table adorned by a pink cotton cloth, bearing just now the remains of an early luncheon—a tray, with remnants of cold beef which had formed the clergyman's repast, and a bone, sole relic of a mutton chop, cooked for the invalid. A penny ink-bottle also stood on the table, with a steel pen and a piece of well-used blotting-paper, hastily brought by Mrs. Hammond from her private parlour for the receipt of her week's account. The child in

the window felt a sudden impatience, child though she was, of the surroundings of her life; she would have had them so different, could she have chosen; were they always to be such as this?

The barrel-organ was still droning its melancholy air; there was a certain sweetness in it too; it seemed somehow to have caught a notion of the sadness yet the beauty of life, and to be trying, falteringly, to tell them to the world. As Marjory listened, feeling lonely and deserted, she longed to fly away, to escape from this stifling little house, the staring road, the endless red brick. She was a country-bred child; until within the last six months her home had been in a retired village, where Mr. Stanhope, her uncle and guardian, had a curacy, a sole charge. Now, as the barrel-organ played, she was thinking of fields and lanes, of peaceful brooks rippling among them, of green woods thick and cool. If only she could turn into a water-baby like the water-babies in the story, and lie down in one of those brooks, under the shadow of one of those great trees, she would be perfectly happy! She shut her eyes, and tried to fancy that so she was lying now, but the bare imagination made

the reality of closeness, and town, and shadeless heat, seem almost maddening.

At this moment the baby in the background burst into fresh screams, and Mrs. Hammond appeared, with a worried face, to remove the luncheon tray.

"These schools!" she said—"schools! schools! schools! what's the good of 'em? What do children want with so much education? We never had it in our time, and we're as much use in the world as ever they'll be! And there was parson, always a-teasing about my Martha being at home, and setting 'Ammond on the same—and that was worse: so there is she gone off this blessed Monday morning, and here am I with not a soul to nurse the baby, and he a-screaming fit to craze one, if I do but turn my back."

"I'll nurse him, if you like," said Marjory, in her old-fashioned voice.

"No, thank you, miss, he's too much for you; you're tired out, and no wonder—waiting on your poor aunt as you've been, week after week. No, let him scream a bit—it'll do him good—exercise the lungs of him; and the children will be home directly—ought to, however! and if Martha dawdles,

she shall catch it—leaving me to slave while she's at her books like a lady! What will you please to have for your dinner, my dear?" said Mrs. Hammond, with a sudden change of tone. She felt a mother's compassion for the solitary child.

"I don't want any dinner, thank you—I'm too hot. I wish I could have some strawberries—or ginger-beer!"

"Ginger-beer, my dear, you could have if there was anybody to fetch it. Mrs. Pudge, she sell it uncommon good at twopence the bottle."

"But I haven't got twopence," said the child, old-fashioned no longer.

"Oh, as to that, miss, I'd advance the money out of my own pocket."

"No, I mustn't cause extra expense to Uncle John," said Marjory, relapsing into womanhood.

"Well, then, my dear, still less could you have strawberries," said Mrs. Hammond; "They're a shilling a quart in the market; and, when you have 'em, where's the pleasure? gone in a moment—no substance in 'em whatever. Give me a good beefsteak, say I!"

"Please, I'd like a glass of water," said Marjory; "I'll come to the kitchen and

fetch it; and then I am going for a walk."

"A walk in this heat, my dear! and no dinner! Couldn't you fancy a morsel of tripe? There's some, beautiful, cooking this minute for 'Ammond, and you're welcome to a plateful, I'm sure, if you'll only say the word."

"Thank you, I'm not hungry — only thirsty," said Marjory, repressing her shudder from regard to Mrs. Hammond's feelings; "I'll go and try to find a cool place."

"You'll have to go to another world then, I fear," said Mrs. Hammond, lifting the tray; "such weather I never saw since the summer before 'Ammond and me was married, when he used to come courting to Thorne, and Mrs. Bell'us—that was my lady's own maid—used to say: 'Well, Martha, you can never deny that he's risked his life for you; for, if he hasn't a fit before you've done with him, it's not the sun's fault, nor his.' For 'Ammond he was out of work just then, so he'd come all hours of the day—too often, however," said Mrs. Hammond, disappearing tray foremost.

Marjory followed her to the little oven of a kitchen, where the baby, tied in his chair,

was still screaming, and the dish of tripe was simmering with savoury odours. The child turned her back to it, and drank her glass of water; she would then have endeavoured to comfort the afflicted baby, but at this moment the other little Hammonds returned in a flock from school, and Martha was at once summoned to her post. There was now no room for Marjory in the little kitchen; and, full of her craving for the country, she was glad to slip away, only pausing to tell Mrs. Hammond that she should not be at home before tea-time.

"Don't you go and get into any mischief, my dear," said the landlady, anxiously. "I wish you could a-made yourself happy here! Tommy and Grace should keep you company in the parlour."

"I want to get into the fields," said the little one, plaintively; "I'm so hot, I can't bear it any longer."

Mrs. Hammond was too busy, and too much absorbed in the tripe, to expostulate further; and Marjory was a mile or more away before the good woman thought again of her.

CHAPTER II.

"A burning sky is o'er me,
The sands beneath me glow,
As onward, onward, wearily,
In the sultry morn I go.

"From the dusty path there opens,
Eastward, an unknown way;
Above its windings, pleasantly,
The woodland branches play."—*Bryant.*

In her shabby brown hat and holland jacket, with cotton gloves, extensively darned, on her shapely little hands, Marjory passed through the iron wicket, and turned into the road towards the church. The sun beat down upon her; walking was hard work, in such weather, to such weary young limbs; but she was dreaming of green fields, and lanes where trees met overhead, and the vision lured her on.

There was pleasure, too, and excitement, in the mere fact of this solitary adventure. After living the unfettered life of a wild bird until she was ten years old, the last six months had been sadly burdensome to her,

shut up in the narrow little house; and of late her aunt's illness had increased her imprisonment, confining her in a close bed-room for long hours of the burning summer days. She was a most innocent and childlike child; yet cares naturally antipodal to childhood, were to her strangely familiar. That poverty of all kinds most suffering—that of gentle life—had formed the atmosphere of her home. Calculations as to how sixpence might do the work of sevenpence-halfpenny; altercations with servants concerning cinders and candle-ends; care-worn faces when letters in blue envelopes arrived, were matters of every day to her. She knew what it is to see a beloved one pining for something which a little, only a little money could supply, and not to have that little. She knew what it is to feel rich in all generous impulses, to be ready and longing to give, and yet to lack the power; further, for that lack to be called "mean" by some apparently poorer than one's self—thought hard or even heartless by others for whom one's sympathies are painfully alive. She knew how the dread of bankruptcy, of disgrace worse than death, can shadow all life like a cloud, day by day, night by night, yet of necessity be kept secret, hidden from the

world. All these things she had been long accustomed to see daily in her home ; and the sight had grafted upon her childishness a certain old-fashioned gravity which, could she be heard and not seen, might well imply her to be at least a hundred years of age.

In the country, when she was spending most of every day in the open air, finding among flowers, birds, and insects, friends to whom care was unknown, the burden of this did not weigh upon her to any hurtful extent. But of late, when to anxiety within was added a world of red brick without, that burden had been altogether too heavy for the child, undermining her healthy young life. Mr. Stanhope, absorbed in other things, observed no change in her. His wife was less blind ; but she felt too much oppressed by poverty and ill health, to imagine the possibility of relief for Marjory, more than for herself. Sometimes, indeed, when she was alone, crying quietly over their difficulties, a few extra tears would roll down her faded cheek, as she thought of the child brought face to face, thus early, with all the weariness of life; but she mentioned this to no one upon earth—where were the use, she thought ?

Had either she or her husband, however, imagined the little one's danger of that catastrophe commonly called "breaking down," they would have been of one mind, that, come what might of the extravagance, Marjory must share in the sea-side week pronounced by the doctor to be positively, vitally, necessary for Mrs. Stanhope herself. As it was, every penny, nay, every farthing, being of terrible importance to the poor clergyman, Marjory, albeit with great reluctance on their part, had been left in the suburban lodging, under charge of Mrs. Hammond—alone for the first time in her short life.

It was not, however, the first, by many a time, that she had gone on a solitary walk. In their country home, when her short lessons were over, she had been free to wander as she would. Mr. and Mrs. Stanhope were so entirely absorbed in one another, that a third person, even of Marjory's minute proportions, was sure to be at times in the way. Of this fact Marjory herself was childishly unconscious; but it made them the more indulgent to her in point of liberty; moreover, her pedestrian powers far exceeded those of her delicate aunt. To-day—only that she was so strangely tired—she felt as if old times

were come again. Away from all red brick; this was her first object, as with dogged patience she threaded her way through the suburban streets.

At length the semi-detached villas began to give place to stray houses, here and there, very new—one or two still in the hands of much-enduring masons, whose escape from sunstroke seemed a miracle. A little later, she came to a hedge, a real hedge, rich in wild roses. Wild roses were among the things for which she was hungering; she scrambled up the bank, resolved to fill her hands while she could. Some were too fully blown, too much injured by the dust, to repay the encounter with their thorns; but others bloomed beyond, and, regardless of time or of distance, she strayed along, seeking the best. She took no account of the road or its numerous turnings. Her eyes fixed constantly upon the hedges,—crossing from one to the other, as attractions varied,—she wandered on until checked by sheer exhaustion.

The sun was still high in the heavens; it was about the meridian of the burning afternoon. A sycamore tree rose from the hedgerow; beneath lay a patch of shade. Marjory sat down in its midst, and arranged her

glorious nosegay. Carefully her little hands blended, in harmonious conjunction, pink, white, and delicate green, binding the whole together with blades of grass to make her treasure secure. Then she rested her head against the tree; and looked about her.

She seemed to have got verily into the heart of the country; not a human creature was to be seen, not a human sound to be heard. The quiet road stretched before her; fields lay around, some with grazing flocks, some with the young wheat springing,—begun already, in places, to be a little golden; some with hay spread, newly mown, or in cocks ready to be carried. The scent of the hay came to her, borne on no breeze—for breeze there was none—but as it were a part of the atmosphere, mingled with the sweetness of the sycamore flowers—among which a multitude of bees stirred with continual murmur. Marjory listened and looked, and enjoyed the rest, and the sweet odours, and the dreamy hum. Branksome, with its ugliness and newness and glare, seemed a hundred miles away. Here was altogether another existence; here, if the blazing heat still made life more or less oppressive, yet all was free and fresh—Nature seemed bountiful, and God seemed

good. The child felt this, although she could not have expressed the feeling; she sat on, not thinking of return, conscious merely of the relief of her escape. No officious clock was here to remind her of the time; only the sycamore shadow lengthened a very little, as the silent minutes went by.

Presently she began to grow thirsty again; and the rippling brook for which she had craved recurred to her fancy. The desire to find such a brook became as keen as her previous desire for the flowers. Slowly she rose, and dragged her little feet to the highest point of the bank. Far away—or so it seemed to her—she saw the low gray tower of a church—a village tower, just visible above a clump of trees. Then, as her eyes gained strength in scanning the radiant atmosphere, she discerned a cottage roof or two, gleaming in the sun; last of all, a mass of chimneys, as of some large house, and even a part of the house itself, standing out against the background of foliage. Somehow that house attracted her; why, she did not know — unless for a vague fancy that near it she should find the brook; its music seemed already in her ears, calling her to come.

She took up her bunch of roses, and crossed the road to a stile leading to a foot-path which wound away through the meadows. The stile was high and clumsy; Marjory had to creep under the lowest bar, and emerged covered with dust. She brushed it off, however, thinking that ere long she would bathe her face in the cool, clear brook. Her landmarks were the gray church-tower, and the gleam of house-front; the ground soon rose, and hid them from her sight; but, her face turned steadily in their direction, she journeyed on. There were cows in the meadow; but Marjory was not afraid of cows; she had had dear friends among them in her country life. When one or two stopped grazing, and eyed her with some mistrust, she said "Coop, Coop," and stretched out her hand in token of amity, and went on, fearing nothing. A locked gate, five-barred, divided this meadow from the next. Marjory clambered over it, regardless of consequences, and was calmly making her way through the long grass, when she was startled by a red face, rising like Jack in the box from behind a neighbouring hedge.

"Hullo!" said a rough voice, "what are you doing there? You go back this minute, or——"

The threat, whatever it might be, was suddenly suspended, cut short by the startled expression of the great blue eyes turned in wonder upon the speaker. The little slight figure in its shabby cotton frock, yet dominated by that inherent look of "ladyhood"—the tired child, with that strange expression of premature anxiety, plodding so patiently through the long, thick grass—the sight of her seemed to touch the man; perhaps he had a little girl of his own.

"Beg pardon, miss," he said, touching his hat, "I thought it was one of them school children. This field's put up for hay—no thoroughfare at present. Where did you please to be going?"

"The church and the great house," said Marjory, pointing in the desired direction; "I want to go there."

"Is it Thorne you mean, miss?" said the man.

"I don't know; but I want to go there," repeated Marjory.

The man looked dubious for an instant, then made up his mind.

"You just please to turn, miss, and go back into the meadow where the cows be. It's all for the best, for there's no way

through these 'ere fields to Thorne, and you'd a-come to a good stiff hedge before long; though I'm sorry if I scared you. You keep along the hedge to the left, till you comes to the turnstile; and then follow the footpath, and it 'll lead you to Thorne, straight as the crow flies. It be precious hot, however, and you're but a little 'un to be travelling on a day like this."

"Thank you," said Marjory, "I can rest when I get there. I'm sorry I came through the grass. I'll go back as fast as I can."

Then the patient little thing turned without a murmur, and plodded her way back to the great gate. The man surveyed her, half pitying, half amused, until she was out of sight: after which, with a chuckle of "Her's a rum 'un," he refreshed his spirits from a minute barrel of cider, and resumed his occupation of cutting thistles.

CHAPTER III.

"When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green,
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen :
Then hey for boot and horse, lad !
And round the world away !
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day."—*Charles Kingsley.*

Meanwhile Marjory, although her legs were fast becoming rebellious, exerted all her pertinacity to attain her object before giving way. Through the turnstile to another wide meadow, the great blue sky beaming unshaded upon the foot-path ; through a wicket gate, across a turnip-field, under a second stile, across a bean-field ; through a turnstile once more, along a meadow where hay was being carried, and some slight dread of the hay-makers lent impetus to her speed ; through another five-barred gate, open in this case ; out into a shady lane.

Here she paused. On one side the lane was bordered by young plantations, shut off by low iron palings ; on the other by a hedge

at the summit of a high bank, where elm-trees, growing at regular intervals, cast a continuous shade. Should she turn to the left or to the right? Each way seemed the same to little Marjory, as she stood irresolute, weary and puzzled. Her goal was no longer in view; the dilemma was strong upon her: when she heard the sound of a horse's hoofs coming slowly up the lane from the left. She turned, half curious, half timid; but neither horse nor man was to be seen. The clear atmosphere rendered every sound doubly manifest to-day; that treading of invisible hoofs coming nearer, nearer, seemed to the child almost supernaturally tardy.

She thought of a wild tale which she had read, of a phantom horseman. This lonely lane, with the thick plantations stretching out as far as she could see, was just the place for such a being, if such there were, to haunt. The hay-field, to be sure, was behind her, and she could hear the voices of the haymakers; but her nerves were overstrained, her physical powers almost exhausted, and she could not control a tremor as the sound still steadily advanced. What if it should come close up to her and pass, like that phantom of the story, invisible all the while? As she stood

spell-bound yet fascinated by the fancy, a sudden rustle in the plantation made her start; she looked fearfully in that direction, and saw, not a spectre, but a young girl, who, emerging from behind a cluster of shrubs, knelt down on the mossy ground. She had a rustic basket on her arm, a trowel in her hand; and, after peering for a second or so among the plants with which the ground was thickly covered, she proceeded, singing all the while to herself, to dig vigorously at certain of their roots.

She was a very pretty girl, fair and delicate-looking, with a brilliant complexion of red and white, and a profusion of auburn hair. Every movement of her figure, as she worked the trowel, was graceful; and her clear young voice, not silenced, like the birds, by the heat, rang like a silver bell across the road.

"He will return," it sang; "I know he will;
He will not leave me here to die.
He will not—will not—leave me here to——"

Only, as it appeared, at this instant, she became aware of the approaching hoofs. Her song broke off suddenly; she glanced quickly from behind a bush at the horseman, who now at length was turning the corner of the

lane. In the same moment, as if instinctively, she dropped the trowel, smoothed her hair rapidly with one hand, and with the other twitched into prominence a blue ribbon hitherto almost hidden by the collar of her jacket.

It was a neat little jacket of plain black; her dress too was merely a clean print with an innocent blue sprig; and her hat was of brown straw, like Marjory's own, shady, featherless, with a plain ribbon quilling. Yet in all these sternly simple things lurked somehow an element the reverse of simple. What was it—something in her face, or in her general manner, which gave her more the air of an all-fascinating princess of fashion, than of the unsophisticated village maiden implied by her dress?

The above minute arrangements instantaneously completed, she snatched up her trowel again, and resumed her work, with a diligence which even Marjory's childish eyes perceived to be now a little studied. Meanwhile, though still very slowly, the hoofs were advancing close upon them. Marjory turned from the plantation to inspect the new comers, heralded so long.

The horse, a beautiful chestnut, thoroughbred, with bright eye, sensitive nostrils, ears

ever alert, was groomed to perfection, his coat shining, his tail of strictly orthodox proportions,—the bits, stirrup-irons, and all other appointments, in character. His rider was quite a young man—perhaps some months over twenty; about five foot ten in height, lightly but strongly built, of soldier-like deportment; dark-haired, dark-eyed, his brown skin made browner by sunburn—his features somewhat strongly defined, but marked by a certain carelessness, not to say recklessness, of expression. He came slowly on, whistling a merry tune,—a bright, light-hearted young fellow as ever the world saw; looking as if he had been born in the saddle, holding in the spirited chestnut with a light yet masterly hand, thinking of anything and nothing, as he rode through the quiet lane. He wore a light straw hat, and a suit of summer tweed—common enough, yet of an unmistakable cut, such as Mr. Hammond, Marjory's landlord, who was considered a very fair tailor, would have given half that he possessed to acquire! But Mr. Hammond, fortunately perhaps for his own peace of mind, was not present;—only Marjory, looking not with tailors' eyes, gazed admiringly, as at a pleasant spectacle, thinking how much

"nicer" this young horseman looked—she could not have told why—than any of the young men whom she was accustomed to see in the half streets, half roads of Branksome.

He was passing the plantation with the careless glance which seemed habitual to him, and which had lighted for a moment upon Marjory, lighting off again as quickly, when a cough from the young horticulturist attracted his attention. He looked again—stopped with sudden animation,—and reined in his horse.

"Hollo, Jessie!" he said, laughing, "What are you about? I'm always finding you in unexpected places!"

"I might say the same of you, Mr. Hugh, I think," said the girl, with a quick upward glance: "I'm sure I was never in my life so startled as I have been lately by you!"

"Did I startle you just now?" asked the young man, laughing again, and looking full at her all the while, with a mixture of admiration and amusement; "I don't believe it."

"Thank you, Mr. Hugh; you needn't, unless you like. If you won't believe me, I can find a plenty that will," returned the girl, tossing her head.

"You could make any man believe that black was white," said Mr. Hugh, the admiration increasing in his dark eyes as he watched her graceful manipulations with the trowel. "And I'll believe you now: to prove it, I apologise for the startling."

"Thank you, sir. I think you'd better be moving on; your horse is impatient, and you hinder me."

"Let me come and help you. What are you about?"

"Getting burdock roots for her ladyship, sir; but I want none of your help, I'm much obliged to you."

"I tell you what, Jessie—you inspire me to alter the old fairy-tale. Toads and vipers come from your mouth—for me, at least—when you speak; but the mouth transforms them into pearls and diamonds on the way, and so they do me no harm."

"What nonsense you do talk, Mr. Hugh, to be sure! Mr. Brown, he declares that he never saw what a favourite you seem with the young ladies when he's waiting at table; but, if that's true, I can only say I wonder at their taste. Or, perhaps, as I'm not a young lady, you think any rubbish will do for me."

"By George, you're fifty thousand times more of a lady than half the girls I meet! The prettiest I know would give half she had for the shadow of such a face as yours."

"I should like to hear you tell her so. You needn't think to take me in, Mr. Hugh; I know your ways. Please go on; I can't work while you sit there staring; and in half an hour I have to meet her ladyship at the lodge."

"You'll never do that, Jessie, unless I come and help you. Only say the word, and I'll be with you in one instant."

"I dare say; and a fine lecture I should get from mother. She'd be sure to find it out, and perhaps tell her ladyship. If you mean half you say to me, sir, you'll leave me to work in peace."

"What is to be done with those burdocks, Jessie? If the dear old lady is meditating a sanitary soup, pray tell me; forewarned is forearmed."

"Indeed, I wouldn't tell you! No such thing. You gentlemen think so much of your dinners! But, unfortunately, they're not for soup; they're for medicine—for Mary at the lodge."

"Take care you don't poison her! If one

root is hard to get up, I wouldn't warrant you not to take the next at hand, whether burdock or hemlock."

"Thank you, Mr. Hugh; after that, it's time I left you, since you won't leave me," said Jessie, springing to her feet.

"I do like to take a rise out of you, Jessie," laughed the young man. "You look so bewitching when you're angry."

"Good afternoon, sir. If I'm late for my lady, I must tell her how it is," said the girl, sweeping her chattels together, and flitting away through the trees.

The young man remained stationary, looking after her until the last flutter of her light dress had vanished; then he allowed his horse, which had long been pawing and fidgeting, to have its way, and rode on down the lane at a quick pace. Marjory looked after him, as he had looked after the girl, until he was out of sight. Her indecision as to her route was at an end; a vague impulse prompted that she should follow where the rider had disappeared.

And still without break the plantations went on, and the lane, hot though shady, went on, and little patient, toiling Marjory went on, for full ten minutes longer.

CHAPTER IV.

"With many a curve my banks I fret
By many a field and fallow,
And many a fairy foreland set
With willow-weed and mallow.

"I chatter, chatter as I flow,
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever."—*Tennyson.*

At last a change came. The plantation ceased to border the lane; in its stead, still shut off by iron palings, stretched the undulating swards of a park. Marjory crossed the road to a low white gate by which the paling was presently divided. No house was visible, but the ground was evidently well cared for. Alderney cows, black and white, and sheep of some strange foreign breed, were feeding here and there on grass like the rich turf of a garden; around them rose massive cedars, dark in shade, ancient elms, more ancient oaks, interspersed by a choice variety of young trees, each with its wooden fencing. Half a mile or so beyond the gate,

the view was bounded by a rookery. Marjory could hear the cawing, softened by distance, and see the dark nests like blots in the heights of the trees, and the black-birds wheeling to and fro against the hot blue sky. But in another direction, somewhere to the right, she heard a different sound, which stirred her tired little frame with a new impulse of life and energy. That sound, not very far away among the slopes of the park, was the ripple of a brook.

The low white gate opened at a touch; the child entered, timidly at first, glancing at every tree as if some one might be expected to break from ambush and rebuke her intrusion. But penetrating further among the grassy slopes, now up a height, now down into a hollow, she soon lost all sense of fear. Rippling and singing, nearer every minute, rang the music that lured her on. Presently, on the summit of a slight elevation, appeared a simple bridge, a couple of hand-rails, and a plank. Marjory walked faster, and was soon looking down upon the desired object.

The majority of brooks had long been dry, but this particular stream must have its rise in some fountain not easily exhausted. It was very low, however; only enough re-

mained to ripple over the stones, and bear testimony, as it were, of the brook as it had been and would be yet again. The shallow water was transparent as glass. Marjory, looking over the hand-rail, could see every indentation in the brown soil at the bottom, every little pebble; she saw water-cress also, and other green plants, and little long-tailed tadpoles darting about as if possessed by some spirit of quicksilver. She wished that she were small enough to float like them on the water, that the brook were a river, and she could lie down in it and sleep. It was very hot, even here; the hand-rail burnt her arms. On the opposite bank a great lime-tree spread its boughs, as if offering protection to all weak and helpless creatures. Marjory crossed the plank, and at the foot of the friendly tree stretched her weary little frame full length upon a bed of moss.

Only now, for the first time, did she discover the full extent of her fatigue. She had never in her life felt so tired; the aching was almost pain. She could no longer see the brook at the foot of its steep banks, but its music blended dreamily with the hum of insects and the far-away cawing of the rooks. Little yellow-eyed daisies were looking up

from the soft grass; golden trefoil, purple orchis blossoms, tiny speedwells, clustered about the roots of the tree. All around was a manifold luxuriance of ferns, of grasses, of leafy plants, sorrel, white clover, dandelion clocks, which there was no breeze to scatter. It was a silent, solitary world, far more congenial to Marjory than that in which she had lived of late.

But presently the thought of her long homeward walk came with sudden recollection upon her. Slowly rousing herself, she rose to her feet, but was driven back by a strange numb faintness; her head swam, a mist came before her eyes, a singing in her ears. A second trial, after a little more rest, was followed by a like result. There was nothing for it but to resign herself, and lie still as before. But what would happen at Branksome if she could not return? Hammond would certainly write —perhaps telegraph—to her uncle. What a disappointment for him, when he was counting upon a quiet week of rest! And the anxiety would make her aunt ill again. "It would be dreadful—I couldn't bear to vex them so," thought Marjory.

A sense of desolation swelled her childish heart until it felt ready to break. She thought

of her father and mother, long in Paradise, and wondered if they could see her, and if they pitied their little girl, so tired and so helpless. She thought of the angels, of their flights from heaven to earth to minister to man; oh, that an angel would come to her, and give her strength to go home! She thought of stories she had heard of children found dead in lonely places, and wondered whether she also would be found dead when morning came. The notion terrified her; as she thought of it, tears fell thick and fast, and her little chest was shaken by convulsive sobs. Then she felt the need of a living presence in nature. The tree stretched its protecting shade above her as before, the bees hummed on, the brook sang, but nothing spoke; there was no voice, nor any that answered, nor any that regarded. For the first time little Marjory learned the meaning of the word loneliness, learned it in such a manner as she could never forget.

At length, when her tears were spent, she sank into an exhausted sleep. How long that sleep lasted she could not tell, nor how it was finally broken. Suddenly she opened her great blue eyes, and looked up—not now into the silent boughs, but into a human face.

It was the face of an old lady, who was bending over her, scrutinising her through a gold eyeglass in a short-sighted way, and poking her gently the while with the point of an open umbrella — a little old lady, thin and slight, with a trim waist like that of a girl, dressed very plainly, in mourning, a large black mushroom hat tied with broad ribbons under her chin. Her hair was iron-gray, intermixed with threads of silver, parted simply across her forehead, which was marked by many a furrow of bygone care; she had gray eyes, a little dim, but still full of mental activity, a large hooked nose, a mouth kind but grave, plenty of good white teeth, and a decided chin. All these things Marjory noted, continuing her upward gaze.

"Is this a little girl?" asked the old lady, peering a trifle more closely.

"Yes, please," said Marjory, trembling. Despite the old lady's small stature and the plainness of her dress, she had a dignity of deportment which awed the child, who was, moreover, in secret fear of some mysterious punishment for her trespass.

"And why do you not get up when I speak to you?" inquired the old lady.

"Please, I can't," said Marjory, humbly;

"At least, I can't stay up. I tried twice."

"What is your name?" was the next question, after a moment's pause.

"Marjory Stanhope."

"Stanhope—Stanhope!" The old lady stooped yet lower, and contemplated the child with more attention. A little further questioning elicited other particulars: after which a new light appeared to break upon the old lady's mind.

"I have heard of your uncle through Mrs. Hammond, the clerk's wife. And are you there in those lodgings alone?"

"They couldn't help it—they couldn't take me; it was the expense," said the little one, eager to guard her uncle from any suspicion of neglect.

"I understand," said the little old lady; and suddenly Marjory perceived the depth of kindness veiled by the cold gravity of manner. "And you have walked all the way from Branksome in this heat! Now, how are you to go back?"

"Perhaps I shall soon be better," said Marjory, sighing helplessly.

"There is little doubt of that, but not to-night. You are over-done; you could not

walk ; and, if I sent you in the pony-carriage, what comfort would you find when you got there ? "

The child made no reply at first ; but, finding that the old lady expected one, she said " I don't know " again, and sighed as before.

" Would there be any one to put you to bed, to take care of you a little ? "

" There's only Mrs. Hammond. I don't think she'd have time to put me to bed."

The old lady meditated.

" Would your uncle, Mr. Stanhope, be offended if I took a great liberty ? "

Marjory stared in languid wonder.

" I know Mrs. Hammond well, and I know her *ménage*. That would be my excuse—that, and you being really unfit to go back to-night. It would hardly assist Mrs. Stanhope's recovery to hear that you were ill, alone in those lodgings ? "

" She would want to come back—she *would* come back," said Marjory, hopelessly ; " and then she would die ! The doctor said that a very little might kill her."

" Then, perhaps, under all these circumstances, Mr. Stanhope would pardon me if I were to carry you home ? "

"To Branksome?"

"No, to my own house, close by. You know him best; tell me, would he be greatly affronted by my taking the law into my own hands concerning you?"

"Oh, I'm sure he would only think you so very, very kind!" cried the child, wondering, in her youthful heart, what this strange old lady could mean by anticipating anything but gratitude from the bestowal of a favour!

"I will send at once to Branksome for your things, and to tell Martha Hammond where you are. She must be wondering at your long absence. You are not afraid, then, to trust yourself to me?"

Marjory shook her head with a smile. It was rest, greater than she could have told in words, to be cared for in this way. And it was also an adventure; she enjoyed it, like reading a new story! She would rather have known the name of her benefactress; but she was too shy to ask.

"Very well; I must leave you alone a little longer, while I see about the pony-carriage; and then I will come and fetch you."

"Perhaps I could walk now. I'll try,"

said Marjory, loth to give trouble. But the little old lady said, "No; lie still!" in a commanding tone, and, turning, walked away over the grass under her black umbrella.

CHAPTER V.

. . . "She lay there . . half tranced,
And wished, at intervals of growing sense,
She might be sicker yet, if sickness made
The world so marvellous kind, the air so hushed,
And all her wake-time quiet as a sleep."

—*E. B. Browning.*

Marjory was too thoroughly spent to feel more than a languid excitement in the prospect before her. Nevertheless, her little heart did considerably quicken its beating when she heard wheels approaching with light swiftness from the direction in which the old lady had disappeared, and saw a low basket pony-carriage, drawn by a small white pony, and driven by the old lady herself, a trim page in dark livery seated on a minute perch behind. With great effort, the child rose to her feet; she staggered, but the page's arm was held before her, the old lady's hand was stretched out from the low carriage; and with one step Marjory was safe in the comfortable wide seat, her head supported by a cushion, which the little old lady, with deft fingers, had put just in the right place.

The pony trotted along, highly appreciating the springy softness of the turf; a large umbrella, screwed into the back of the carriage, afforded ample shade, beneath which Marjory rested, shy but happy—observing, wondering, conjecturing. It was like a fairy tale; the old lady was a fairy godmother, taking her away from sordidness and discomfort to some fairy palace. On they went, over the grass, passing now and then one of those strange, long-haired sheep, which sometimes looked up and calmly eyed them, sometimes, indifferent, continued to browse. The great trees cast long shadows upon the green; the gnats danced before the carriage; the rooks cawed; the pony tossed his head, and shook his mane, in high spirits, despite the heat. Presently another low, white gate appeared; it might have been the same by which Marjory had entered the park, excepting that beside it stood a picturesque lodge —low, with a deeply thatched roof, the walls hidden in honeysuckle and roses. Here the carriage exchanged the turf for a broad road, which wound its way among the slopes of the park, and the pony quickened his pace a little, as if he scented his stable. Beyond the trees on her right hand, Marjory saw the

summit of the gray church-tower, espied from far away. It was quite near now; the house in its neighbourhood was the house to which she was bound. The road turned at right angles into an avenue. At the end of the long vista of massive oaks rose a square old mansion of gray stone, before which the pony, performing a noble sweep, came of his own accord to a standstill.

Either the drive, or the excitement, or both, had dispelled Marjory's faintness. She found herself, with some assistance from the old lady's arm, able to walk into the house. They entered first a great hall, oak-paneled, dark and cool. Upon the walls were ranged stuffed birds, heads and skins of beasts, old oil-paintings of men in armour, with flowing locks—pieces, perhaps, of that very armour, shining helmets, huge mail-gloves, a battle-axe, rapiers of curious make: then again objects more peaceful—as regards human peace—stags' antlers, foxes' brushes, fishing-rods, bows, a large and well-worn target. A polished oak table stood in the centre of the hall, and high-backed oaken chairs around it; on each was a coat of arms, and a crest of a mailed hand raised to strike.

"Can you walk upstairs?" said the little old lady.

"Yes—I think," said Marjory, timidly. There was in this old hall a grandeur which impressed her childish mind with indefinable awe.

"We will take our time; there is no hurry," said the little old lady. The staircase and balustrade were all of massive oak, the steps wide and very shallow, with roomy landing-places, where large china jars emitted faint but delicious fragrance. On every landing the old lady paused, that Marjory might rest. At the top a carpeted passage, oak-paneled, like the hall, and hung with ancient portraits of people long dead, stretched on either side of the staircase. The old lady led Marjory some way to the right, past several doors: one of which at length she opened.

Within was a large room, with windows wide open, looking out over an old-fashioned flower-garden, divided by a sunk fence from the park. The paper of the room, old-fashioned also, was the first thing noticed by Marjory, who thought it beautiful beyond words. The pattern was of roses, full blossomed and straggling, with plenty of

green leaves and mossy buds, and brightly-coloured birds scattered among them. Much the same pattern, in chintz, adorned the curtains, valances, and high-backed arm-chair, also the fittings of a little tent bed which stood behind the door, facing the windows. The windows had deep seats; on one of these stood a large work-basket, piled with calico and holland, and beside it, in the chintz arm-chair, sat an elderly woman, sewing. She was dressed, like the old lady, in mourning, with a white cap, of plain but delicate texture, tied beneath her chin; an inexpressible look of neatness and cleanliness characterized her appearance; her complexion was pale, but healthy—for she seemed strong and active. Her brown hair was as yet untinged by gray, her clear brown eyes were bright and observant; and her face had an honest truthfulness which more than redeemed the homeliness of its features. She rose respectfully as the old lady entered, and, work in hand, looked with some surprise at Marjory.

"Bellhouse, will you give up your chair to this young lady for a few minutes? I wish to speak to you in the next room."

"Certainly, my lady," said Bellhouse,

quickly placing her work in the basket, and straightening the cushion of the arm-chair. Marjory sat down in it as desired, resting her weary head against the brightly hued back. The little old lady and the elderly woman left the room together; when they returned, the woman's expression was full of motherly interest.

"Marjory," said the old lady, "this is my maid, Mrs. Bellhouse. Bellhouse, this is Miss Marjory Stanhope; you will be good enough to make her comfortable in every way."

"Certainly, my lady," repeated Bellhouse.

Then the little old lady stroked Marjory's cheek, with the backs of two fingers upwards; and having glanced round the room, specially at the little tent-bed, and again with gentle gravity at Marjory, she went away.

"You do look sadly tired, my dear," said Bellhouse, kneeling down to unbutton the child's boots. "Just about worn out, aren't you?"

"I'm very hot too," said Marjory; "and I ache all over."

"How long is it since you had any food?"

"I had some breakfast, only not much—

because the bread was sour. I couldn't eat any dinner."

"And you've been walking all day in the broiling sun, with nothing inside you! No wonder you were faint! We'll mend that as soon as possible; but I'll get you into bed first, for you don't look fit to be sitting up —no, indeed. Her ladyship's as good as a doctor, any day; and she says she can see what ails you. You've been helping to nurse your sick aunt, I understand, my dear?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hammond is always busy, and Uncle John was often out; so the nursing fell a great deal upon me," said Marjory, in her quaint manner.

"Poor thing! and you but a baby yourself! Well, it's been too much for you, that's plain. But, now, how thoughtful of the Almighty to send you across her ladyship! Why, there's not such another lady anywhere in the land. She won't let you go till you're well again; we may be sure of that."

All this time Bellhouse was busily undressing the child, with quick but gentle fingers. She now rose, and from a high chest of drawers, old-fashioned like the rest, took a small night-gown of fine linen.

"This will fit you nicely, missy; and I'll make the bed in a trice. But, first, a bath might refresh you. Should you like it, my dear? See!"

She opened a door in the wall, and revealed a little bath-room, with taps of hot and cold water, and every convenience for their use.

"Oh, I should so enjoy it! It would cool me so!" cried Marjory.

"But you must have it rather warm, or it wouldn't be healthy, and you so thoroughly heated. I'll turn on the right temperature. There! You'd best leave the door ajar; then, if you're taken faint and call, I shall hear you directly."

So Marjory, who, while accustomed from babyhood to "rough it," had been brought up like any princess in the matter of cleanliness, bathed in the pleasant water, greatly to her comfort, and came back in the snowy little night-gown, much refreshed.

"Here's the bed all ready, my dear! let me lift you in. There now, lie down, and rest to your heart's content. And now I'll get you some food. Is there anything you can fancy?"

"Only—" began Marjory; and paused,

remembering Mrs. Hammond had said that strawberries were a shilling the quart.

"Only what, my dear? Please to say. If it's anything whatever in the house, her ladyship would be too happy."

"If there were one or two strawberries to spare," said Marjory, hesitatingly. "If not, never mind; but, if there were——"

"One or two! When you get well, missy, I'll take you to see the gardens. Why, we're noted for our strawberries! Her ladyship gives baskets and baskets away, and bushels go to market besides. Yes, you shall have some strawberries, my dear, and welcome; but first I must get you something more solid, after such a day."

So saying, Bellhouse quitted the room, leaving Marjory alone. Oh, the unutterable sense of peace which stole over her, as she stretched her weary little limbs! How cool, how restful, how fragrant, was this little bed! How kind her ladyship and Bellhouse were! How beautiful, through the open window, the green trees of the park! She felt as though she should never again care to rise—she was so tired, and it was so delightful to be nursed! How soft the pillow felt beneath her head; and the mat-

tress had no hard lumps, like that at Mrs. Hammond's. She had been trained to think lightly of bodily discomfort; but much that strength may make a joke of, becomes a trial in weakness. Marjory was a healthy child enough; but a burden greater than she could bear had of late been laid upon her; beneath it health and nerves alike might have failed; help had come when most it was needed.

Bellhouse returned with a damask-covered tray, upon which was a little chicken, delicately minced, and a glass of wine and water. Marjory had thought eating, strawberries excepted, impossible a few minutes before; but when she saw the dainty chicken, with its faultless accompaniments—brilliant silver, shining glass, a little roll, a snowy napkin—the repulsion passed away. Bellhouse stood beside her pillow, and fed her in tempting morsels. Before long both meat and drink had disappeared, and Marjory felt all the better.

"And now, Miss Stanhope, my dear, you've been a good young lady, and you shall have your strawberries."

Opening the door, she brought in a little table, left outside until the more solid viands had been disposed of. Here, heaped upon

a dish of rare old china, was a perfect pyramid of strawberries, such strawberries as Marjory had never dreamed of—almost as large as a greengage, many of them, beautiful in hues of red and white. There was a cream-jug too, of the same china, full of rich cream, and a little basin to match, with powdered sugar. The child's blue eyes shone with delight as she looked first at this tempting spectacle, then at Bellhouse.

"There, my dear, eat as many as ever you like. I'll move the table close to the bed; you shall help yourself. Her ladyship has a great opinion of strawberries; she says that they have saved lives. And her ladyship's very learned in all the Almighty sends—fruits of the earth, herbs, and suchlike. She doctors many a one, and cures them too, with nothing else."

"Mrs. Bellhouse!" said Marjory, as the woman moved to and fro, folding the child's clothes, and putting the room in perfect order. "Mrs. Bellhouse!"

"I should be glad, Miss Stanhope, if you would please to call me Bellhouse. It would put me in mind of some that are gone; and I should much prefer it, my dear."

"Very well, I will," said the child; "I

was going to ask you—what is her ladyship's name?"

"Her name is Lady Thorne, my dear. To think that you did not know it!"

"I knew the place was called Thorne; but she did not tell me her own name."

"Very likely she thought there was no need,—her ladyship is so widely known. Her husband was Sir Archibald Thorne; and this is Thorne Court. Thorne of Thorne the family have been for generations on generations; but that's at an end now, after the manner of this world's glory, my dear."

"How do you mean?" inquired Marjory.

"They're all gone, missy—every one; not one left so much as to inherit the name. Sir Archibald, he has been dead ten years; and the baronetcy died with him. Her ladyship has a distant cousin of her own, but Sir Archibald was the last of his stock. There were some fine children," said Bellhouse, lowering her voice, with altered tone. "But the Almighty took them, my dear. Ah, yes! her ladyship has known trouble."

She paused in the act of folding Marjory's frock, and looked out, up at the sky, through the open window. Marjory heard her sigh, and saw her lips move slightly; she seemed

for a moment to be speaking to some one far in those heights of blue. As she resumed her occupation, her lips were compressed, her face was very grave. Marjory did not like to say any more to her just now, and lay back in silence, watching, as, her task completed, she returned to her seat in the chintz arm-chair, and went on with her sewing.

Presently some clock struck a half-hour; and immediately afterwards a great bell rang loud and long. Five minutes later, the door opened, and a young girl entered, walking noiselessly, as one who had been so trained —the only sound being the light sweep of her draperies, as she crossed the room to one of the deep windows. Here she sat down, resting her elbow upon the sill, her chin upon her hand; and gazed out over the park. Marjory looked at her with interest, mingled with wonder, recognising at once the girl whom she had seen in the plantation. She looked at the girl, and the girl by-and-by looked at her—curiously at first, then intently. Then, on a sudden she turned away, gazing towards the park, as before.

"Well, Jessie!" said Bellhouse, who had looked up as she entered, following her

movements with her eye, "I hope you took pains with her ladyship?"

"Dear me, mother!" said Jessie, tossing her head, "you speak as if dressing her ladyship were a work of art! I don't know what room there can be for pains in a plain black dress, a chemisette, and a cap!"

"As to works of art, Jessie, I don't rightly understand you," said Bellhouse. "But there's nothing to be trifled with, neither, in caps of real lace and dresses of black satin."

"I never said there was, mother! Only it does provoke me that you think I can't do that much by myself. I should just like to show you what I could do, if I had the chance! If I could dress Lady Rose Fairlegh, now, for her next ball. You don't half know what I've got in me, mother! How I do envy that Davies of hers; and she has no notion of her advantages. When Lady Rose went to the hunt ball from here, I longed—more than I can tell you, mother—to take off that jessamine wreath Davies was so proud of, and put it on again my own way. And her hair too! They said she was one of the belles; but, if I'd had the dressing of her, she'd have been *the* belle, and no question about it. She's a

very fine girl, Lady Rose; but a good bit depends on her dress. She'd make twice the sensation, I know, if she parted with Davies."

"Jessie! I am astonished at you," said Bellhouse, severely; "To speak like that of high-born ladies! 'A very fine girl,' indeed. I'll tell you what, Jessie, I cannot countenance such disrespect. If her ladyship heard you, she would be more shocked than I can bear to think of."

"Well, but if you come to think of it, Lady Rose is a girl, as much as I am one. Of course, I shouldn't call her so in public; any more than I should call my lady a woman. Nevertheless, facts are facts, whether we speak of them or not."

"Just so; and it is a fact that we owe respect to our superiors. How you come to be my daughter, Jessie, I can't think; disrespect I never could abide, let deal in it who would. But I doubt you've been made too much of, my dear, and your silly head is turned. It vexes me a good bit, Jessie, to hear you talk in this way."

"Well, mother, I won't, then. I'm sure I don't want to vex you," said Jessie, putting out her pretty hand to stroke Bellhouse's shoulder. "By-the-by, mother, what non-

sense folks are talking about Lady Rose! Mr. Brown says that he hears, everywhere, there's to be a match between her and Mr. Hugh. I don't believe a word of it."

"Well, my dear, it don't do to believe all the gossip one hears, or half; but still that seems a likely match enough, and a nice one. Lady Rose is a very good young lady, and would make him a good wife, and she's beautiful too; and, unless I mistake, Mr. Hugh is one who will look for beauty in his wife. If he gets goodness with it, so much the better."

"I don't believe, all the same, that he'd care to marry Lady Rose; she's not his style. Mr. Hugh admires fair people."

"What have you to do with Mr. Hugh's admirings?" said Bellhouse, looking up from her work to fix her clear eyes upon Jessie's face. "Those things are quite out of your province, Jessie. Mr. Hugh is nothing to you."

"I suppose there's no harm in saying that he likes a fair style," said Jessie, colouring slightly, as she leant out of the window. "Mother, how sweet that syringa is! I can smell it all the way up here, just like orange flowers."

"Yes, it has a delicious scent," said Bellhouse. "I often think how good the Almighty has been to us, in giving us so many scents, each perfect its own way. Our life would be very different without them; there's a deal in the smell of a flower. I've read somewhere of their bringing back old days better than anything, and I've found it true. There's many and many a time crowds back on me, without my seeking, as I sit sewing in this window, and the different scents come up, some one day and some another, just as the wind comes."

"Well, for me, I've no old times to crowd back," said Jessie, lightly. "New times are what I want! I'm tired of the old."

Then she leant from the window again to inhale the syringa's fragrance, and to listen to the wood-pigeons cooing dreamily among the trees in the park.

"I wish I was a lady, mother!" she said suddenly, drawing in her head.

"Oh, my child! you shouldn't wish such things as that," said Bellhouse, sighing.

She looked again at Jessie, with a look which had something of real pathos; though she was biting off a thread the while, in a matter-of-fact way enough. But matter

of fact and pathos lie sometimes in mournful proximity.

"Why shouldn't I?" cried Jessie. "Where can be the harm? What a strait-laced thing you would make of me! Not only mustn't I do this or say that; I mustn't even wish."

"The Almighty knows what's best, my dear, and we ought not to go against His will."

"Oh, dear, mother! you do take life so seriously, 'tis quite awful. Why should you bring religion into everything? I know nothing about all that, I'm sure; but this I do know, there can be no harm in wishing to be a lady. No, and I may be one yet; and that 'll be no harm, either."

"I don't understand you, Jessie," said Bellhouse, looking really uneasy—uneasiness which Marjory's childish mind could not fathom. "To be sure," she added by an after-thought, "we may all be ladies in actions, if we try. But a lady in station you can never be; so don't you pine after it, my child," said Bellhouse, pleadingly.

"Ah, you've not heard of Lady Burleigh, mother, that's plain," said Jessie, laughing.

"Lady Burleigh! there's no such lady in these parts," said Bellhouse, puzzled.

"No, she's in a poem; but it is true; I read it the other day. She was born plain Sarah Hodges, a cottage girl; but Lord Burleigh married her. To be sure, she died young, from the burden of her honours, the poem says; but I think that was very silly of her. As for me, I'm more likely to die young from longing for honours I haven't got. I wish I could have her chances; I wouldn't die young, I know!"

"Hush!" said Bellhouse, glancing towards the bed; then, lowering her voice. "You're talking quite wickedly, Jessie; hold your tongue. No Lady Burleighs for me!"

"Ah, wait till the Lord Burleigh comes!" said Jessie, laughing again. "Such things have been, mother, so you needn't stare in that shocked way. Of course, I don't really expect any such good fortune," she added, as her mother still looked at her as if petrified.

"Such ill fortune, you mean," said Bellhouse. "What would you do as a lady, I'd like to know? and your mother a poor servant. I tell you what, Jessie, you make me feel very uneasy; I don't know what's come to you."

"Nonsense, I was only trying to shock

you," said Jessie, with another laugh; "I've no business, either, to sit idling; my vases must be filled before dark."

She rose, glancing lightly at her mother; and, seeing that the troubled look continued, bent to kiss her, crying, "Why, mother, can't you understand a joke?"

"Some jokes are edged tools, my dear," said the mother, not satisfied—though evidently pleased by the kiss.

At this moment some one knocked at the door, asking to speak with Mrs. Bellhouse. Bellhouse obeyed the summons; her daughter, lingering behind, stole noiselessly to Marjory's bed. Her fair cheek was tinged by crimson, delicate yet rich, like that of some hot-house flower; her eyes were bright, as from some inward excitement.

"You'll excuse my chattering so, Miss Stanhope? I hope I've not disturbed you."

"Oh, no," cried Marjory, gazing in undisguised admiration.

But Jessie still lingered, straightening the coverlet, smoothing the pillow. As a step sounded in the passage, she suddenly stooped, and said, in a hurried tone:

"I'll be so much obliged, missy, if you

won't mention to mother that you saw me in the plantation?"

"No, I won't," Marjory innocently replied.

Years later she remembered that promise.

CHAPTER VI.

"The old house by the lindens
Stood silent in the shade,
And on the gravelled pathway
The light and shadow played.

"I saw the nursery windows
Wide open to the air;
But the faces of the children,
They were no longer there.

* * * *

"The birds sang in the branches
With sweet, familiar tone;
But the voices of the children
Will be heard in dreams alone!"

—*Longfellow.*

When Bellhouse returned, she carried with her a shabby little trunk, which looked strangely out of keeping with all else in that room, but which Marjory at once recognised. It contained the child's modest wardrobe, already brought from Branksome by the servant whom Lady Thorne had despatched to ease Mrs. Hammond's mind. Mrs. Hammond had also sent a message to the effect that,

though grieved to hear of Marjory's illness, she could not but rejoice at any chance which had placed her in the hands of "her ladyship."

Thus all was peacefully settled; and the sense of repose deepened on the weary child, as she lay watching Bellhouse unpack her clothes and put them neatly by. The long day was drawing to its close; the sky was luminous with the soft glory of the sunset; a wonderful rest was enfolding woods and fields, and the living creatures that dwelt among them. The intense heat was lessened for the time; the western crimson foretold its return to-morrow; but meanwhile there was a respite and a calm. Soft voices sounded below in the old-fashioned flower-garden; the ladies had just left the dining-room, Bellhouse said, and had come out to breathe the evening air; the wood-pigeons were cooing with gentle melancholy; Jessie had disappeared; Bellhouse sat sewing in her chair; a peaceful drowsiness stole over Marjory,—the outer world faded from her sight.

When she awoke, the sun had quite gone down. The windows were still open; she could see Bellhouse in the dim light sitting in one of them, her work laid by, looking out. The sky was overspread by a soft blue, blend-

ing into delicate green; one star, of silver covered by transparent gold, was shining in the west. Bellhouse was resting her cheek upon her hand; her profile showed against the background of sky: a homely profile, thickly cut, but good and true, with a certain sad anxiety of expression, and yet, underlying this, a calm. Marjory watched it for a long time in a kind of dream; faint perfume from the syringa was floating in at the window; all was very silent. Bellhouse herself looked like a statue, sitting motionless. Long afterwards the scent of syringa would bring that whole scene and its feelings back in a flood to Marjory.

And there was another, a more prosaic scent, which brought it back,—that of a cigar. This also stole in after awhile, and with it the sound of a footstep below the window —a man's footstep, slow and somewhat sauntering, pausing now and then, as if its owner were enjoying the beauty of the night. Presently, from a neighbouring grove, came a silver-like note, risingin to the stillness; as of some heavenly bird which had strayed and lost its way, and was calling to a companion in the heights. The footstep stopped on a sudden; a young man's voice—the same

which Marjory had heard in the lane—exclaimed:

"Mrs. Bellhouse! I took you for a ghost! Is that a nightingale?"

"No, sir, a thrush," replied Bellhouse in a cold tone, turning her face outwards.

"I suppose your Thorne thrushes are better than other people's? We have no such notes at Copelands! He came to serenade Jessie, perhaps. Tell her so."

"I beg your pardon, sir. I do not understand you."

"Is Jessie there, Mrs. Bellhouse? Ask her to come to the window. I'll tell her myself and save you the trouble."

"Thank you, sir, Jessie is gone to bed. I will wish you good night, if you please, Mr. Hugh. I am afraid of disturbing the young lady."

"Oh, by-the-by, how is the poor little kid?" said the young man, with careless good nature.

"She will be better, I thank you, sir, when she is rested. I wish you good night, sir."

"You're uncommonly stiff to-night, Bellhouse. I've offended you in some way; I must know how, to-morrow. Good night,"

said the light-hearted young voice. The easy footsteps strolled on out of hearing, the cigar-perfume passed gradually away.

"Mrs. Bellhouse!—Bellhouse, I mean," said the child—"Who is Mr. Hugh?"

"Miss Stanhope! are you awake, my dear?" cried Bellhouse, instantly alert. Her tone, full of warmth and heartiness, was different indeed from that of two minutes before. "And how do you feel, missy, after your nice long sleep? I thought I would not disturb you till you woke of yourself; so I lighted no candle."

"I feel much better, thank you," said Marjory.

"I'm so glad of it, my dear; I thought you would. Rest is what you want, and care, and both of those you shall have. Now here's some nice jelly, ready and waiting; and then you shall sleep again till morning."

"Who is Mr. Hugh?" repeated Marjory, as she passively accepted the jelly.

"Why, did you hear me talking, missy? I'm afraid we disturbed you."

"Oh, no, I was awake; but I saw him before. As I was coming here, he passed me——" She paused, blushing scarlet, remembering her promise to Jessie, and won-

dering whether Bellhouse would inquire how she could know that the young man whom she had seen in the lane was the same whom she had heard beneath the window. But Bellhouse was occupied, unfolding the chair-bed in which she was to sleep, and no such question occurred to her.

"Mr. Hugh Vivian he is by rights, my dear; only we always call him Mr. Hugh, by reason of his father. Mr. Vivian is the largest squire anywhere about, and a part of his estate touches her ladyship's. He is much respected everywhere, is Mr. Vivian. Mr. Hugh is in the army—a cornet, I think, they call him. His mother is a particular friend of her ladyship, and we have known Mr. Hugh from a baby; he comes and goes as he likes, and makes himself at home. He and Mrs. Vivian are spending a week here now; Mr. Vivian couldn't leave home, so Mr. Hugh is escorting his mother. Her ladyship is very fond of him; and, as to that, he's a nice young gentleman enough—in his own place, Miss Stanhope, my dear."

Marjory did not at all understand what this latter remark might imply. She was silent a little while; then, pursuing her own train of thought:

"Does Jessie always live here?" she inquired.

"Jessie has lived here seventeen years, my dear—ever since she was two years old. I have been in her ladyship's service almost all my life: first as nursery maid, then head nurse, then lady's maid. It was here that I married Bellhouse; he was Sir Archibald's valet, missy. Three years we lived together in a home of our own, in Thorne village, and there Jessie was born: and then my husband died and I came back here, and Jessie with me; and here I shall stay to the end of her ladyship's life or mine."

"But Jessie would like to go away, wouldn't she? I thought so from the way she talked."

"You mustn't pay any attention, Miss Stanhope, my dear, to the way Jessie talks. She doesn't mean half she says. You see, Jessie's been a bit spoilt: that's how it is," said the mother, apologetically. "When first she came here, every one was so glad to see a child about the place again: and then, as she grew older, her ladyship would encourage her to read history and the like, besides all the good teaching she got in her ladyship's schools; and what with her being pretty and

that, and sharp, and having more education than some, she was always made much of by visitors. One young lady actually taught her to play on the piano! I sometimes think she's never been the same girl since," said Bellhouse, sighing: "I take a good bit of blame to myself too, my dear; for, being left a widow, and Jessie all I had, perhaps I have been too proud of her; and I only pray that, if I was, the Almighty may not humble me in a way that I could not bear," she added in an under-tone.

"I think Jessie is very pretty, Mrs. Bellhouse—Bellhouse, I mean."

"Yes, say 'Bellhouse'—do, my dear; it sounds so natural. My husband, being my cousin, was the same name as myself; so Bellhouse I've always been, and Bellhouse I always shall be. And there were some that lisped the name so pretty! Your voice is a little like Miss Evie's, my dear. Yes, Jessie is pretty, there's no doubt. But I don't know—I don't know," said Bellhouse. "Perhaps she'd better be ugly. It's not the outside the Almighty looks at; it's the heart."

"But I always think that pretty people must have pretty souls," said Marjory, innocently; "and Jessie looks very nice too."

"Well, missy, she's a very kind girl—yes, say it though I should not—and something very sweet in her disposition; but she's proud, my dear. I'm sorry to say it of my own child, but—I beg pardon, Miss Stanhope, and I hope you'll excuse me—you, being young, might think it fine and take pattern by it, if I didn't warn you. Her pride is this, my dear—I tell you, that you mayn't be led astray by her talk—she can't abide to be put in a low place; no, that's gall and wormwood to her, missy. And she won't submit to be looked down upon; I believe she'd sooner die than be slighted. It's a sad failing, and will have to be humbled, I doubt," said Bellhouse, sighing.

"Bellhouse, I thought Lady Thorne looked at this little bed so sadly!—as if some one who once slept in it were dead."

"It was Miss Evie's bed, my dear—the last who was taken, and the eldest of them all. She died when she was twelve years old; she would have been thirty-five now; a married lady, perhaps, with children of her own. Sir Archibald and her ladyship had been married years before she was born; so they set all the greater store by her. I came as nurserymaid soon after; her ladyship was

then as happy as heart could wish,—with a good husband, and a sweet baby, and all that this world's wealth could give. Her ladyship lived in her affections, for all she is so quiet and grave in her way—and cold-like, some have called her. But there's no coldness in her heart! I tell you what, Miss Stanhope, my dear, if anyone had told me in those days that her ladyship could lose all she has lost, and yet live on, I could not have believed it! But there's some of the most faithful hearts that do live in spite of all, like ivy clinging to the stones after the wall's fallen."

"Which of the children died first?"

"Miss Jane was the first, missy. She was but a baby—a pretty baby, as ever anyone saw. Ah, her ladyship grieved sore over that! but she didn't know what was coming. Then, two or three years after, Master Archy was killed by a fall; and, last of all, Miss Evie went, of something on the brain. She slept herself away so peaceful, pretty dear! Ah, I did love her, Miss Stanhope—she was like my own child, having known her from the first. I can see it all now, when I look back: that first evening,—me shy, and a bit homesick—I was but fifteen—and the nurse sitting by the fire, and the baby in the basi-

net; and I thought it such a lovely darling; and her ladyship coming in, and saying, "Well, Anne! how are you?"—so quiet, but kind through all, as I felt directly. It was in this very room, Miss Stanhope, my dear. This was the nursery."

"This very room!" repeated Marjory, under her breath. The spirits of those children so long dead seemed near, as she looked round at the bright paper which they had doubtless admired, at the furniture among which they had played.

"Yes, for eight years it was the nursery; and then Miss Evie's room. Her ladyship thought of Miss Evie, I could see, when she looked at you, my dear. Miss Evie was just about your size, for she was small of her age, and slight—with blue eyes like yours. Twenty-three years, yesterday, it was since that darling died!"

"And was this her night-gown?" said Marjory, touching the delicate frill that edged her wrist.

"One of the last set I made; there are children's things of all sizes in those drawers. I have orders to keep them aired in case they are wanted; it's not often an occasion comes, but her ladyship likes to be prepared. They

are old, but I've kept them free from moths; and they were beautiful linen to begin with. And they bring the dear children back—quite wonderful, Miss Stanhope, my dear!"

"But how dreadful for all the children to die! I wish they hadn't died," said little Marjory, with an aching heart.

"Yes, it was dreadful at first, my dear. There was no doubt of that. But now the worst has long been over. Ah, they're better, safe in Heaven."

The yearning tone of this last sentence struck even Marjory's childish ear with a sense of pain. She asked no more questions, but lay back, wondering what it could be that, at times, sent such a pang through this quiet woman; thinking also that it would be better, no doubt, if she, and such as she—children who had to live pent up in little lodging-houses, among relations worn down by poverty—were safe in Heaven; but that it seemed strange, and a pity, for those other children, surrounded by every comfort, with such a pleasant nursery, such a happy home, to have been taken from those who loved them, thus early.

Vague questionings about the problems of life floated through Marjory's brain. Why

was Lady Thorne left alone, a widow and childless, with so much money—so much more than she could possibly want; while her own uncle and aunt were so miserably in need of money—obliged to keep Marjory, moreover, when they had barely enough for themselves? Why had not she been taken instead of Miss Evie? It was only wonder —not complaint—speculative, dreamy wonder. Why? What was the reason? what was to come of it in the far future of which her uncle had taught her? She lay pondering all these things, and watching Bellhouse, who was kneeling now, with hidden face, to say her evening prayer,—until her blue eyes closed from sheer heaviness, and sleep overcame her once more.

CHAPTER VII.

"I affirm that, since I lost it,
Never bower has seemed so fair ;
Never garden-creeper crossed it
With so deft and brave an air,
Never bird sung in the summer
As I saw and heard them there.

* * * *

"As Aladdin sought the basements
His fair palace rose upon,
And the four-and-twenty casements
Which gave answers to the sun ;
So in wilderment of gazing,
I looked up and I looked down."

—*Elizabeth Barrett Browning.*

NEVER, throughout her future life, did Marjory forget the sensation of opening her eyes next morning in that nest of a bed, in the bright, old-fashioned room, with its curious paper. Only half awake from a dream about Mrs. Hammond, and forgetting, at first, that she was not in her own close little chamber, she gazed towards the window, instinctively expecting a vision of red-brick backs and hideous chimney-pots. Instead she saw a

calm expanse of sky, veiled in the soft haze of early morning, thick masses of foliage stretching beneath it, heights of great shady trees which to look upon was rest. The thrush of the previous night was singing again, making the most of his time ere the sun should overpower him. A hush reigned over nature; the house was silent; the roses on the paper made radiance in the room; the bright birds seemed to revel in the joy of the morning.

Marjory felt perhaps, in infinitesimal degree, what Eve might have felt when she awoke from her first sleep in Paradise. This place seemed verily a paradise to the tired child, whose town life had been such dire imprisonment. She was an imaginative child too, with a keen sense of beauty, and a strange susceptibility to outward impressions of every kind. Just as yesterday she had felt overwhelming oppression from the universal presence of red bricks, so now the green world around her seemed to have become a part of her very being.

She desired nothing but to be still; and this, to her joy, the old lady decreed for her. For she came, the little old lady, later, though still early, and stood over Marjory's pillow,

and gazed at her, gravely and gently, recalling to the child what Bellhouse had said of her having a look of Miss Evie. Before leaving the room, she inquired whether Marjory were fond of reading; and, receiving an emphatic affirmative, a whole pile of books was shortly placed upon a table beside the bed. And now was Marjory more than ever in Paradise. Like many solitary children growing up among people of literary tastes, she had read a great deal in the course of her short life. Her uncle, despite his poverty, had gradually collected a small library of standard works,—second-hand, or in the cheapest editions; but Mr. Stanhope was wont to remark that he had never found the contents at all affected by their covering; and they served equally well as the same in morocco or Russian leather, to educate Marjory's youthful mind. They made but a shabby figure, to look at, upon their humble shelves of stained deal; but none the less had they power to stir the souls of men. Many of them Marjory had read again and again, unconsciously influenced, though only half understanding. Few, if any, *bonâ fide* children's books were comprised in this collection; only Aunt Lucy possessed some

volumes of old fairy tales, which Marjory knew almost by heart.

A famine of books had been one of her Branksome trials. One box alone of these treasures could be unpacked in the crowded lodgings; and they were chiefly theological works, for Mr. Stanhope's private use. Aunt Lucy had novels now and then from a circulating library; but novels were forbidden to Marjory. Hence all the more delightful was the feast now spread in abundance before her.

"Evelyn Thorne, from her mother." "To Evie, on her birthday." "Evie, with her father's love." This name, in varying forms, was inscribed on almost every opening fly-leaf. The books had evidently been read again and again; they had been favourite books of Miss Evie's. Marjory handled them with a half reverent, half melancholy feeling, and wondered whether their owner had been sorry to leave them behind—and whether she ever thought in Paradise of these old stories which had pleased her so much on earth.

All the day through the child lay thus, reading, resting, dreaming. Only once she sighed, and said plaintively, turning her face to the wall; "I wish Gerald were here, Mrs. Bellhouse!"

"So do I, missy if you wish it," replied

that good woman. "But who is Gerald, my dear?"

"My brother," answered the child, in the same plaintive tone. "He lives with Grandmamma Wilton, in Northumberland—too far for me ever to go. Uncle John has never any money to spare for the journey; and grandmamma is very poor too; we are all poor: why doesn't God give us some more money, Bellhouse, I wonder?"

"That's best known to the Almighty himself, my dear. He does know best about all things, we may be sure — quite sure, Miss Stanhope, my dear," said Bellhouse firmly. "Yes," she added, as much to herself as to Marjory, "if I didn't feel quite sure and certain of that, I should have given up hope, many's the time. But then I do, thank God! You and your brother were left orphans, I suppose, my dear?"

"Yes; when I was a baby. I can't remember my father and mother one bit. Gerald can—he says so, at least; Aunt Lucy thinks it must be fancy. He was only a little past five when they died; and I have never seen him since then. But we write to each other very often; and when we are grown up, we mean to live together all our lives."

"That will be something for you to look forward to, my dear—to grow up a nice, good young lady, such as your brother can take a pride in, and that will keep his house for him pretty, and make him comfortable. You must keep aiming on to it, Miss Stanhope, my dear; and the thought will bear you through your troubles," said Bellhouse, compassionately. Bellhouse had never before come across such an anomaly as a poor young lady. It appeared to her one which could not be sufficiently pitied.

"I don't mean ever to marry, Bellhouse; I shall live all my life with Gerald. He often writes about it in his letters. Gerald is so clever! He goes to school—it is a grammar-school, in the town near grandmamma's house; and he has got a number of prizes. But what he cares most about is drawing and painting; he wants to be an artist. Grandmamma says that he mustn't think of any such nonsense; but it isn't nonsense, is it, Bellhouse?"

"I should have thought, my dear, that it wasn't quite the trade for a young gentleman. I don't know, though; when they're so poor, I suppose they're obliged to earn their living as they can, like us humbler folk. Did

you mean an artist to paint signs for doors, or take photographs, missy?"

"Oh, no—not that! I mean an artist like Michael Angelo, or Raphael, or Sir Joshua Reynolds," cried simple Marjory. "Such wonderful pictures they painted—such faces, and such colours! You would feel as if you were in heaven, Bellhouse, if you saw them! I have only seen prints of some of them; but I have read about them, and the prints gave me an idea; and I have thought a great deal about them, because of Gerald."

"I understand you now, missy. There are many very fine pictures here; her ladyship sets great store by them. But I thought it was some kind of trade to make them, like any other trade, such as cabinet-making or tailoring. It never entered my head that they had been made by gentry."

"Some were gentlemen by birth, and some not," said Marjory, in her old-fashioned mood. "It could not much have mattered; those great painters must all have been gentlemen inside, even when their outside did not seem so. Such grand thoughts they must have had! I have read that, however beautiful their pictures were, the *thought* of

the picture—in their own minds—was more beautiful still."

"That's a thing I can quite believe," said Bellhouse; "I remember, many's the time, in my younger days, when I was making a bonnet for her ladyship, I'd such a vision in my mind of what it should be! I'd seem to see it before me, so to speak, like dancing in the air, with trimmings all so genteel! but, somehow, I never could make the real thing turn out like my fancy. Something seemed always wanting. Jessie, now—she's always satisfied with her work. But, then, she's cleverer than I am, a vast deal, Miss Stanhope, my dear."

"I should like Gerald to see Jessie. He would draw her, I know; and you should have the picture, Bellhouse. This place would so delight him; it is so old and so beautiful. I wish it was really a fairy place, as it seems to me; because then I could put an enchanted ring on my table, and the next day he would be here. But I shall tell him all about it in my letters. He says my letters are like stories. I save up all the bits of paper I can find for them. Uncle John calls them scribbles."

"You ought to take pains with your

writing, though, Missy. Miss Evie's hand, at your age, was beautiful. I'll show you her copy-books some day."

"But Miss Evie had no brother a long way off," said Marjory, wistfully. "If she had, I do think she would have been obliged to scribble sometimes. There seem such a number of things to say. Do you know, Bellhouse, I mean, some day, to write a book. I've got such a plan!—only it is a secret; and no one knows it but I myself, and Gerald."

With this she subsided into silence, her face resting upon her hand on the pillow, and her eyes gazing through the open window towards the grand, still trees. Bellhouse wondered, looking up now and then from her work, what thoughts were making that childish brain so busy; but she asked no questions, and Marjory said nothing more.

As evening approached, she began to wish to get up and visit the fairy region below. This desire being reported to Lady Thorne, permission was given that she should rise when the bell rang for dinner. Accordingly, towards eight o'clock, Bellhouse escorted her to the drawing-room. She was dressed in a white frock of spotted muslin, taken from the

contents of the shabby little trunk—a frock scrupulously plain, and bearing traces, to a practised eye, of having been twice at least "let down" since its original construction. Still it suited the childish form well enough, and was altogether of secondary importance to the wavy yellow hair, the blue eyes, bright but deep, with dark eyebrows and lashes, the square forehead, childish yet unchildish, thoughtful beyond its years. The whole face was the face of a child, but a child who had experienced much that belongs usually to a later growth; who had already, in a practical manner, learned the necessity of fortitude, of endurance, of courageous combat with circumstances.

Left alone on the threshold of the drawing-room, she stood still at first, then entered on tiptoe, with a look half of awe, half expectation, as if exploring some enchanted chamber in the palace of the White Cat or Beauty's Beast. The room was empty; a large room, thoroughly comfortable, with an abundance of ottomans, settees, quaintly-shaped chairs, and footstools. The walls were wainscoted half way to the ceiling with oak panels, richly carved—faces, flowers, leaves, and fruit in curious combination; each panel was sepa-

rately a study. Above the wainscot a light paper, bright though delicate, extended to the ceiling, which was also of oak, carved and intercarved like the rest. In the papered space were many pictures—pictures of all kinds; some in oil painting, some in water-colour, some portraits, ancient or modern. They had been hung at various times, with small attempt at special arrangement; but the whole formed an exquisite contrast to the solid grandeur of the oak. A row of latticed windows, with cushioned recesses, ran along the whole length of the wall facing the door. They overlooked a broad terrace walk, descending by a step to a smooth lawn intersected by beds of many patterns, and gay with geraniums, calceolarias, and lobelias, an old sun-dial in the midst of all. Beyond, standard rose-trees bordered another broad walk; and again beyond lay the park, the gray church-tower rising above the trees.

The row of windows was divided by a glass door, similarly recessed; both this and the lattices were thrown open, admitting perfumed air from the pleasant garden. Perfume rose likewise from the depths of the china jars, for which it was Jessie's glory, every summer, to prepare a delightful concoction

of damask rose-leaves and other such ingredients. Marjory thought of the tripe and onions with which Mrs. Hammond's lodgings were scented, and revelled in the change. She sat quietly down on one of the low footstools, under a window, her yellow head resting against the oak; and looked about her.

All was very still, except that bees were humming drowsily among the jessamine which clustered round the windows—jessamine which for many a year had clustered there, which the children long dead had looked upon. Marjory sat with folded hands, and watched the bees floating in and out, in and out, of the old walls, where they had built their nests for generations. Behind the jessamine stems were many holes, portals to those nests; abundant honey was, doubtless, laid up within them. It might be that they were rejoicing over their store; their hum had a kind of music. Marjory, listening, felt soothed and happy, although the heat was still intense, and, to anyone not fresh from Branksome, might have seemed hardly bearable.

Presently in the hall a door opened; voices approached, and soft skirts swept lightly over the floor. Marjory turned from the bees to listen to this new sound, as if she had turned

another leaf in the fairy tale. Lady Thorne, and another, whom she divined to be Mrs. Vivian, entered the drawing-room. The little old lady looked smaller and slighter than ever, beside her companion, who was tall and of grand proportions. But no less stately or dignified did that little old lady appear, with her erect carriage and the grave yet calm expression which characterized her well-defined features. Marjory remembered Jessie's speech, as she noticed the dress of rich black satin, with the soft chemisette, and the snowy cap upon the smooth gray hair. A gold watch-chain, long and thin, and a pearl brooch of delicate workmanship, were her only ornaments; but Marjory gazed upon her with eyes brimful of admiration, with that instinctive homage which "serene old age," such age as Lady Thorne's, unconsciously inspires.

Mrs. Vivian was much younger than her hostess, remarkably handsome, with a complexion of clear white, a Grecian nose, and heavy eyelids, which, uplifted, revealed dark eyes like her boy's. Her hair, just beginning to be streaked with gray, was fashionably arranged beneath a slight fabric of lace and ribbon; a white lace shawl fell gracefully

over her shoulders, shading without concealing their beautiful proportions; she wore a rich dress of purple moiré, with a long train —long enough to have been carried, Marjory thought, like a queen's, by waiting-maids behind her. Her ornaments were in the same grand style—cameos set in gold, earrings, necklet, brooch and bracelets, all to match; and in her hand she carried an exquisite fan of white feathers. A fine and well-dressed specimen of a highly-bred woman she appeared, as she came slowly up the long room. Marjory rose at the approach of the ladies; and her hostess nodded kindly, saying, "Well, little girl, so you have found your way downstairs!"

"Is that the little girl?" said Mrs. Vivian, with a languid glance, as she sank into a low chair. "My dear child, do you know that I regard you as a prodigy? How you could walk from Alton in such weather, and get here alive, is nothing less than a marvel to me!"

"She was only just alive, I think," said the little old lady. "Don't stand, my dear; go back to your footstool, and I will find something to amuse you."

"I wonder you did not melt," observed

Mrs. Vivian, still languidly surveying Marjory: who shuffled uneasily beneath her gaze, and coloured, half ashamed of such unwarrantable stability of constitution! "How did you contrive to avoid melting?"

Thus questioned, and finding reply expected, the child shuffled again, and said:

"It was the country—I felt suffocated—I wanted to get away. This place is cool, compared to Branksome."

"Then Branksome must be a fiery furnace," said Mrs. Vivian, slowly fanning herself. "And I should think the end of it will be that they will all turn into salamanders."

Whom "they" might signify was not clear, neither could Marjory recall the definition of a salamander. Here was a field for recollection, into which she instantly plunged, sitting with hands folded in her lap once more, and blue eyes fixed on Mrs. Vivian. That lady's own eyes were now closed; her head rested upon the back of her chair; she was still fanning herself slowly. As she sat thus, the evening light, falling upon her face, showed lines of anxious care on brow and lip; she looked restless, weary, sad. The peace of Lady Thorne's

countenance—that peace all the deeper because it had followed upon tears—had here no reflection. Marjory, who could no more help observing than breathing, forgot her puzzle, in the involuntary contemplation of the sudden change upon those handsome features—the change from seeming repose, indifferent, a little haughty, to the painful anxiety habitual to Marjory's Aunt Lucy. But Aunt Lucy had so many cares! and Lady Thorne, too, had lost all whom she loved. What cares could this beautiful, rich lady know, that she should resemble the one, and seem so much less happy than the other?

"How terrible it would be—have you ever thought of it, Lady Thorne!—how very terrible, to live in a provincial town!" she said, still with head thrown back and closed eyes, still gently fanning. "I should feel, as that child says, suffocated; I could not endure it. It would kill me," she added, after a pause. "But that might be as well, perhaps, in such circumstances."

"It is not the place that matters so much, I think," said the little old lady, gently. "Anywhere almost, with one's own family, one might make a home. And you know it is not always hot."

"No; but one would always feel shut up. To miss the country freedom, to be cramped for space—it would be insufferable! London one might endure; but a provincial town!—like that Branksome end of Alton, for instance. Life would not be worth having."

She shuddered gently; and Marjory felt an inward rush of sympathy, despite the immeasurable distance from which those languid eyes had appeared to regard this insignificant belonging—daughter, or niece, or what not—no matter!—of the poor curate in charge of unfashionable St. Philip's.

But now Lady Thorne had brought out a portfolio of priceless treasures of beautiful engravings, the first glimpse of which caused Marjory's face to glow and her heart to dance. Bellhouse, in attending upon her mistress, had repeated some of Marjory's chatter—which had seemed to the simple woman vastly clever—of pictures and artists; and this the little old lady had not forgotten. The pictures spread, one by one, upon a chair before her, the child was soon completely engrossed, studying their details in anticipation of letters to Gerald, and delighted to recognise here and there descriptions over which she had pored in some old book. Thus occupied, she

heard only as a meaningless undercurrent the murmur of voices, as the ladies chatted at some distance; Lady Thorne netting diligently the while at a shawl for some old woman; Mrs. Vivian also, now and then, a gold thimble on her finger, adding a few stitches to a roll of delicate lacework,—but more often pausing to fan herself, as if overcome by the heat.

In this manner half an hour had passed, when some sudden sound in the hall broke Marjory's trance. She awoke once more to the outer world, and looked up from her pictures.

Mrs. Vivian was talking in a low voice, tone and manner alike listless; there was in them something that bordered on the stillness of despair. When she ceased, she sat motionless, looking out; the bees were still humming over the jessamine; a rook cawed far away; a warm breath, not strong enough for a breeze, heavy with fragrance, floated from the garden. Somehow they all seemed to speak of relentless Fate, of the years rolling, rolling by, bringing each its own events in its own time, unmoved by the passions of mortals.

"There is no use in fretting," said Mrs.

Vivian; this time her languid voice reached Marjory. "What must be must."

"Would it not be better to warn him?" said Lady Thorne, in the tone of one who feels her suggestion to be painful, and pities the pain, but speaks from a sense of duty.

"I cannot shadow his bright youthfulness," said Mrs. Vivian. "You could not, if he were your son. No; let him have what respite he may!"

"But will it not be all the worse for him when the respite is over?" said Lady Thorne.

"I am like Mr. Micawber, always hoping that something may turn up," said Mrs. Vivian, with a faint smile. "At all events, he will bear it better when he is older. He has never yet known what it is to be crossed in any way."

"I would tell him! I would at least prepare his mind," said the little old lady, gently. But Mrs. Vivian only shook her head, moving restlessly on her chair; and murmured with a sigh from the depths of a sick heart, "Oh, my bright boy!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"So, young muser, I sate listening
To my fancy's wildest word:
On a sudden, through the glistening
Leaves around, a little stirred,
Came a sound, a sense of music which was rather
felt than heard.

"Softly, finely, it inwound me;
From the world it shut me in,—
Like a fountain, falling round me,
Which with silver waters thin
Clips a little water Naiad sitting smilingly within."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

"WELL, mother!" said a gay young voice at one of the windows, with a suddenness which made Mrs. Vivian start, "There you are, enjoying the endless charms of conversation, as usual! What can ladies find to say so much about, I wonder?"

Marjory looked up, and saw Mr. Hugh, in evening dress, leaning with both arms upon the window-sill. The light air of careless grace by which her first view of him had been characterized, was equally conspicuous now; as—half saucy, half affectionate—his

bright dark eyes looked in upon his mother.

"You are smoking, you disgusting boy! Do go away. What will Lady Thorne say to you?—coming to her drawing-room windows with a cigar in your hand!"

"Lady Thorne is well aware of my iniquities, and knows that I can't help them," said Hugh, turning his bright glance upon the little old lady. "Besides, she is very fond of cigars, and would like to smoke herself. Now, confess to me, wouldn't you, please your ladyship?"

"I do not object to the smell," said Lady Thorne, with her gravely gentle smile; "But as to smoking myself, that is another matter!"

"Yes, Bellhouse might copy the practice, and that would be awkward; cost you a mint of money too—especially if Jessie followed in train! By-the-by, Lady Thorne, how pretty Jessie is growing!"

"Rather too pretty, I fear," said the little old lady.

"Too pretty! Come, that is rather too bad," said Hugh, laughing. "There are plenty of young women too ugly, as I know to my cost! but too pretty—*c'est une chose impossible!*"

"From a young man's point of view, perhaps," said Lady Thorne, intent on her netting.

"From anyone's, I should think," cried Hugh, beginning to take the matter in earnest. "I could understand such a speech from certain parties—your estimable Bellhouse, for instance. But you, Lady Thorne—if you will excuse me—who were so pretty yourself, I should have thought you would be superior to those prejudices of envious plainness."

"You are unjust, Hugh," said his mother, languidly; "Men always are. I never read a man's novel in which women are not represented as blind to each other's beauty. In reality, they appreciate it quite as keenly as men, and have often no less pleasure in looking at it. But you know, in that class of life, it does not do to be too pretty."

"That class of life! Prejudice again," said Hugh. "I hope, mother, that in your devotions you represent your views to the Creator of those too pretty women. Your prayers might be useful in averting the transmission of the calamity."

"Don't be profane, Hugh," said Mrs. Vivian. "As to this special young woman,

this Jessie, I really have never noticed her looks, one way or the other. I could not have said, to tell you the truth, whether she were pretty or ugly; neither can I see why you should think it necessary to act as her champion."

"I do nothing of the sort," said Hugh, with a slight deepening of colour; "It is only my British fancy for fair play. And you would really oblige me, Lady Thorne, by mentioning your reason for thinking Jessie too pretty."

"My reason is very simple," said Lady Thorne, "and not worth so much discussion:—merely, that she is in danger of being spoiled! She attracts a great deal of admiration, and I fear that she is too sharp to be unaware of it."

"You are right there, I suspect," said Hugh, laughing; "Jessie is about as sharp as fifty ordinary needles. Why, it is one of her chief beauties! that sharpness is quite bewitching. Now, don't you see, Lady Thorne, looking candidly at the matter, what a mercy it is that the cautious prejudice of the British matron is not allowed full scope? If that same prejudice had its way, it would turn up Jessie's nose, freckle her forehead, imprint a wart upon the most chiselled

portion of her chin, and, in short, demolish a very lovely work of Providence."

"This is not at all an interesting subject, Hugh," said Mrs. Vivian; "I am tired of it."

"Throw away that end of your cigar—which has gone out, I see," said Lady Thorne; "And let us have a little music. I want to hear those duets again."

"All right," said Hugh. "And, by-the-by, where is the kid? You told me she was coming down. Have you sent her upstairs again, because—as you yourself confessed to me—her eyes happen to be blue?"

Lady Thorne pointed with a reproving gesture towards Marjory; whereupon Hugh shugged his shoulders, observing: "'I sez' to Mariar, Mariar, sez' I—praise to the face is open disgrace:'"—and stepped through the glass door into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Vivian possessed a soprano voice of singular excellence; and her son had inherited its rich sweetness, embodied in a masculine tenor. Exquisite harmony these voices together made, as they united in that most lovely and touching of melodies—"I saw thy form in youthful prime." Marjory, on her footstool, listened entranced, and wished that

it could go on for ever. Mrs. Vivian played the accompaniment; Mr. Hugh stood behind her, his hand upon her shoulder. There was an air about these two, of entire mutual devotion; the haughty woman was not haughty to her boy:—every tone of her voice, as she spoke to him, every motion of her eye, as she looked at him, betrayed the most passionate motherly love, blended with infinite pride. Whatever playful affectation to the contrary she might sometimes assume, he was evidently in her opinion perfect. Upon this only child both parents had lavished all the wealth of affection which, in different circumstances, is shared among many; and, in his intercourse with his mother, he had not yet relinquished the confiding air of a petted boy. Although otherwise a manly young fellow enough, he was still with her a "Mammy's darling," caressing and caressed,—and fully proving the truth of her assertion, that he knew not what it was to be thwarted.

Lady Thorne, sitting quietly in the background, let her netting lie idle in her lap. They were together, and she was alone; yet pity, not for herself, but for them, saddened her grave and gentle eyes. Some painful thought, aroused by her conversation with

Mrs. Vivian, lingered visibly in her mind; she sighed softly, once or twice, as she watched and listened. Presently, remembering Marjory, she glanced towards her; and smiled to herself at the child's intense absorption. And then a memory of other days floated back; there was a dimness, like the shadow of a tear, in her eyes, as the song ended:

> "To live with them is not so sweet,
> As to remember thee, Mary."

"Thank you. That was very nice," she said; "I am always so fond of Moore's Melodies. But do not stop yet; we must have another—two such voices are a treat."

"But I want you to hear my mother's last achievement," said Hugh; "I took the liberty of tuning your harp to-day with that intent. She has made the most delightful conglomeration of old Scotch airs, running one into the other—just the thing you will revel in, Lady Thorne. Now, mother, don't be unkind—when I tuned the harp on purpose, in all the heat!"

"Your description is certainly tempting!" said Mrs. Vivian; "A conglomeration of airs running one into the other! Lady Thorne would rather be excused."

"Nonsense—Lady Thorne is not so foolish. Now, mother, there's a darling!"

Marjory had never heard a harp before, and had seldom thought of one but in connexion with the Revelation. Now, as the music of the voices was exchanged for its silvery notes, she seemed to pass from one enraptured dream into another. What is it in those old Scotch airs that goes straight to the heart? Why do they possess so powerful a fascination for every variety of mankind—from the vagabond who pauses in the street when "Auld Lang Syne" drones forth on a barrel-organ, to the cultivated critic who pays a high price to hear the same performed, with every refinement of taste, by a London orchestra. Some touch of nature there must be in them, to make the whole world so akin; and the charm worked strongly on little Marjory, as she listened to Mrs. Vivian. Grand to the last degree, in Marjory's eyes, did Mrs. Vivian look, her rich dress falling in majestic folds, her white fingers moving with easy power over the harp-strings. An accomplished musician, she knew well how to lead each fine old air, through exquisite modulations, into the next; knew also how, with bell-like clearness, to

ring it out above the underflow of accompaniment: which sometimes rose and fell like the ripple of a cascade, sometimes swept hither and thither, as the wind through summer trees, bearing the air upon its gusts.

"Do you like it?" said a low voice, close to Marjory. The child started from her trance, and looked up. Mr. Hugh was leaning against the open shutter of the window in which she sat; she had not observed his approach, and this was the first time he had spoken to her; but her raised eyes met in his gay young face such kindness of expression, that her shyness melted in a moment.

"I keep fancying that it is a fairy tale," she said; "Not only the music, but everything. It all seems too good to be true."

"Too good to be true! that phrase is mere bosh, little Miss Geranium, or Myrtle, or whatever your name may be," said the young man, sitting down and bending towards her as she gazed from her footstool. "Who has been putting such philosophy into your head? it is a form of speech, invented by certain parties who are never happy unless they are miserable. Don't you believe in it! There isn't anything too good to be true!"

"Isn't there?" said the child, a little drearily. "Not for you, perhaps," she added, as an afterthought; "there are plenty of things too good to be true for Uncle John, and Aunt Lucy, and me."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Mr. Hugh, shaking his head with his light smile. "That they may not be true just at present, I will not deny; but who knows how soon they may come! Don't you go and found your views of life on the sentiments of codgers, Miss Myrtle! According to my experience, life is very much what one makes it; the world's a very jolly place to me, and will be so to you, if you will look at it with your own eyes:—I'm certain of that, from their colour."

"Why do you call me Miss Myrtle?" said Marjory, laughing.

"Let's see! What is your name? Oh, to be sure—'tis the association of ideas:

> "'She was my myrtle, my geranium,
> My daffodil, my daisy, my sweet marjoram.'

Sweet Marjoram, that's it, eh? I've seen you before; where, I wonder?"

"In the lane by the plantation," said Marjory, under her breath; "I saw you too, as you rode by."

"Oh, ah, yes—I recollect; you are the child who was standing by the gate. Poor little kid! you must have felt tired to death. Why didn't you ask me to take you up on my horse? And so you came all that way because you were sick of the town? I don't wonder; I get awfully sick of it myself."

"Why, do you live in a town, Mr. Hugh?"

"How pat the little thing has got my name! My regiment is quartered in one; I'm a soldier, Marjoram; I'm a man of blood; I could shoot you, if I chose, scientifically. I am at home for a holiday—that's all; I only hope this heat will be over before I go back."

"Why don't you stay and live at home, instead of being a soldier?"

"One must do something, you know; so saith popular prejudice; and soldiering is rather less of a nuisance than anything else. It's a very jolly life, on the whole; and when the town bores me—I'm country-bred, you see, Marjoram, and I share your partiality for green fields—I jump on my horse and get out of it. There's nothing like a good gallop among the lanes to make one ready for mess. I don't know, though, whether my fancy for the country would

carry me to the extent of walking myself to death."

"Mr. Hugh, have you ever killed anyone?"

"What a terrible question! Oh, you mean in my capacity of man of blood! No, never. I am a fireside soldier, so far, and have only tasted the fun of it. It's a fine thing to belong to the military—nothing too good to be true, in a double sense, for them. We're fêted and danced with, and admired right and left. But then, you know, we may half of us be slashed to death, some day; and that's why they think us such fine fellows!"

"Hugh, what nonsense are you talking?" cried his mother, who, in a piano passage of her music, had overheard these words. "Now mind! I shall keep firm to what I have always told you: if your regiment is ordered abroad, you sell out at once."

"Lady Thorne, did you ever hear such an unpatriotic person?" laughed the young man. "Mother, 'you fair shame me,' as old nurse says. It won't be ordered abroad to-night, at any rate; so pray go on with your music."

"And meanwhile it is time for all tired little people to be in bed," said Lady Thorne, nodding kindly at Marjory.

So this strange, happy evening came to an end, and the picture faded from before Marjory's eyes:—the picture of that fine old drawing-room, and the grave, gentle old lady, and the light-hearted young soldier,—and the fond, haughty, handsome mother playing the Scotch airs upon the harp. Often in after-years it rose again in her recollection; hardly less vividly than now when, in her little bed, she pondered her experiences, while downstairs the music still continued, presently mingling with her dreams.

CHAPTER IX.

"Principles in Edmund's mind
Were baseless, vague, and undefined.
His soul, like bark with rudder lost,
On passion's changeful tide was tossed;
Nor vice nor virtue had the power
Beyond the impression of the hour."

Sir Walter Scott.

NEXT day the childish mind received a shock. Strictly trained in her uncle's clerical household, Marjory's ideas of morality were rigid in the extreme. She was firmly of opinion that no one who was "naughty" could be "nice," and *vice versâ*. Not that the child—like many small persons of her years, in religious families—was of a priggish tendency, or inclined to measure the world by a Shibboleth. But she did imagine that the world consisted of but two classes—one altogether good, the other altogether bad; and she had never realised the possibility of feeling any strong interest in a person belonging to the latter. She had heard her uncle, in his parochial experiences, condemn some one or another reprobate for swearing, drinking, or the

like; and that there could at the same time be anything lovable or attractive in such persons, was a notion of which her philosophy had never dreamed. She thought of all alike as wicked people; and wicked people must be odious people too!

After a night of pleasant dreams, she had awakened so much refreshed that, her breakfast over, she begged to go out. A part of wise old Lady Thorne's plan for the recovery of this child, overweighted by a burden beyond her years, was entire liberty—to rest, or read, or wander, at her will.

"She shall do exactly as she likes, Bellhouse," said that little old lady; "she is not a child to take advantage, I can see, of such a permission. She shall be perfectly free."

So Bellhouse adjusted the child's straw hat, and brought her darned cotton gloves from a drawer; and, only warning her not to tire herself, bade her go whither she would.

Yet another page in this most charming of fairy tales! Marjory tripped downstairs, eyes and heart dancing in concert. It was a glorious summer's day, hot as ever; but children can bear a vast amount of heat in the country. The woods lay dim in haze; the Alderney cows browsed languidly, or

stood motionless, under the heavy trees; the long slopes of park stretched away, away, beneath the blue expanse of sky; the gray church-tower seemed half asleep, as it rose above the elms. Innumerable gnats were dancing their everlasting measures—up and down, down and up, together and apart—over and over and over again. All manner of butterflies floated above the scented flower-beds; a long-limbed dragon-fly flourished his splendid hues, and whirred drowsily—flitting before Marjory; a brown spaniel rose lazily from fitful dozes on the threshold of the glass door, stretched himself, and followed her, wagging his feathery tail. A story-book of Miss Evie's under her arm, she roamed along, exploring, as two days before she had explored the hot white roads between Thorne and Alton. The flower-garden led off into shady paths, winding among green lawns, with seats placed here and there, in some favourable spot for a view. Marjory rested sometimes, and then went on in renewed enjoyment.

Presently great walls rose before her; an open doorway revealed within wide plots of highly cultivated vegetables, diversified by frames and greenhouses, and fruit-trees, care-

fully netted, on the walls—where bright red cherries gleamed, while, rich in promise, plums, apricots, and nectarines ripened in the sun. Beyond, another open door revealed a wondrous vista of strawberry-beds and raspberry-bushes, whereat the child gazed with longing eyes, wishing that she could fill a giant hamper, to be sent by special train to Aunt Lucy. But an elderly gardener, of peevish countenance, issued from a greenhouse, and looked askance, as if preparing to inquire, "Who be you?" Marjory circumvented this intention by speedy retirement, still followed by the spaniel—which had remained at her side in the doorway, evidently aware that further he must not go.

Eleven strokes resounded in a deep and musical tone. Looking round in search of its origin, she saw a gable-ended turret containing a large clock, rising somewhere in the rear of the gardens. Away in this direction she started, spurred on by her childish fancy that all alike was enchanted ground, with new wonders round every corner. The spaniel quickened his pace, and ran along snuffing the earth, as if he had found some track which for him also had allurements. The end of the long walls was

reached; Marjory turned the angle; and saw another stretch of wall, divided by two great gates, enclosing a paved court, with a pump in the midst, and a row of kennels—beyond which appeared an array of ancient stables and coach-houses, all of gray stone, gable-ended, the central gable bearing the clock. The spaniel now, still vigorously snuffing, set off at a rapid trot, and disappeared within the gates; turning, as he entered, to a quarter of the court not discernible from Marjory's point of vision.

For Marjory had stopped short, arrested by sounds in the same direction. Some one was very angry,—in fact, beside himself with passion. The child listened half scared, her cheek turning pale; ought she to run back and tell Bellhouse? Only once before, in her short life, had she heard such sounds; and those had come from a public-house, when she was walking with her uncle. A woman had cried from a window that a fight was going on, and had begged him to step in and make peace; Marjory had been sent on alone, and presently, looking back, had seen a man covered with blood come out, and stagger across the road. Such then had been her terror, that she had set off to run, and had

not stopped till she burst breathless into Aunt Lucy's room,—terrifying Aunt Lucy equally. This scene she had never forgotten. And, now, was such another fight about to take place? Her weak little legs trembled; she was on the point of starting to find Bellhouse—she might even have implored the interference of the peevish gardener—when suddenly she recognised the voice. That loud, passionate, ungoverned voice—it was Mr. Hugh's!

The idea of calling assistance vanished in a second; some undefined instinct withheld her from exposing his shame. She paused, spellbound, her cheeks crimson as before they had been pale. It appeared that this burst of fury was expended on a servant; once or twice a deprecating murmur, plentifully interspersed with pitiful "sirs," replied. The child's generous spirit rose up with all its might. She felt, as she listened, as though she hated Mr. Hugh, and would willingly have engaged with him in single-handed combat in that poor servant's defence. The murmur heightened his rage.

"And you call yourself a groom? Confound your impudence!" was thundered out into the still air. "Why, look here, you

scoundrel! what do you call this? and this? and this?"

At each query came a clash upon the paving, as of some metal article flung down with all the strength of the speaker; and then followed a storm of oaths, shuddered at by Marjory, not merely on their own account, but from the awful condemnation which she had heard foretold for those who uttered them. Moreover, she had never, until this instant, conceived it possible that such words could proceed from a gentleman—let alone a "nice" gentleman! She trembled from head to foot, and stood rooted to the ground in her horror. And, as she stood, out strode Mr. Hugh, passing her, but not seeing her, blinded by his passion—his face and the back of his neck as red as fire, and his usual careless lightness exchanged for an expression one rapid glimpse of which made Marjory shrink and cower. Behind him slunk the spaniel, his tail between his legs, his whole attitude indicative of extreme abjectness—although, by the way, his master did not appear to be conscious of so much as his existence. They were gone in a moment, and out of Marjory's sight; but she remained gazing blankly in the direction in which they had disappeared.

Her meditations were interrupted by more voices. A young groom in working dress, bare-headed, bare-armed, and bare-necked, issued, laughing, from a stable, apparently in full enjoyment of some excellent joke. As he proceeded to wash his hands at the pump, another groom, similarly attired, came from the unseen quarter in which the outburst overheard by Marjory had taken place. To Marjory's surprise, he also, the evident victim, was laughing no less heartily than the other. He approached the pump, extending some object upon his outspread palm.

"Well, he gave yer one for yerself, Jack!" said the first. "I was on the watch, ready to pick up yer 'ead. I thought I should see it come a-rolling."

"It's these spurs as has caught it instead," said Jack; "See how he's served 'em. Why, this un's broke clean through!"

"So it be," said the other, examining. "Well, to be sure! and they wasn't polished to his mind, then?"

"Them and the snaffle," observed Jack, contemplating the contents of his palm with ruminative interest. "Not his face to be seen in 'em with that distinctness as the

Grand Sultan of Rooshia might desire. There's the long and short as that whole amount of swearing was about, Bill! And, talking of 'eads, it's uncommon fortunate as we don't live in them days when young gents could out with their swords and slash 'em off, when they'd a fancy, without 'By yer leave,' or 'With yer leave.' Mine would a-gone this long while," he added, rubbing the article in question.

"Does he often carry on that fashion?" inquired Bill.

"I don't know as to oftens; but, bless yer, whenever he's a mind, he's not particular. I'd back him against any in the troop for swearing like a Tartar. Bless yer, Mrs. Vivian—many's the time I've laughed on the sly when I've seen him with her, as meek and mild as any lamb, and as innocent as a babby. She'd go stark staring, that there lady would, if she was to see him as I sees him! He's a wild young dog, Bill," said Jack, shaking his head.

"Here's my lady wants another groom," observed Bill; "as peaceable a place as you could desire. If I was you, I'd try for it. Just get Mrs. Bellus to speak for you, and 'twill be all right."

"Ah, but I sees the world where I be now," said Jack, with dignity; "A quiet life like this wouldn't suit me. I sees the world; and, after all, he ain't half bad. I don't altogether lose by them tantrums," he added, with a wink; "He's uncommon free-handed—thinks no more of his money than his words, and his friends is the same. Then he's a good master enough when nothing puts him out—a bit high and mighty, but as good-'arted as anybody. All as I've got to do, when them moods is on him, is to hold my tongue, and mind that nothing but humility don't slip out of my mouth. He's for all the world as the fancy turns him. One day it's a good fancy, and another day it's a queer 'un; but as the fancy, so's he, and I've just got to take him as I finds him."

Here Marjory awoke to the conviction that she was acting the part of an eavesdropper; and, turning her back on the stables, she walked away, unseen as she had come.

In that pleasant territory of lawns and trees, adjoining the flower-garden, she found a leafy cage beneath the boughs of a weeping ash, and crept into it, opening her book. The grass was very soft, and the murmur

of insects made a musical accompaniment to the story; but it was long before their charm could beguile her mind from all that she had heard, and from her own thoughts concerning it.

CHAPTER X.

"Kind hearts are here, yet would the tenderest one
Have limits to its mercy. God has none."
Adelaide Anne Procter.

The popular prediction of "Three fine days and a thunderstorm" had long proved itself, for this summer at least, a fallacy; but little wisdom was needed to foretell that the storm, when it did come, would make up in force whatever it might lack in punctuality. Marjory, as she left the stables, had seen in the far distance a gathering pile of clouds, of snowy whiteness, not angry yet—only here and there were their edges fringed with faintest amber. When the luncheon-bell summoned her to the house, she found that pile magnified and thickened. It now resembled a range of snow-clad mountains; and the amber had acquired a lurid brightness, as of a fire kindled behind the snow. The rest of the sky was yet blue; but the atmosphere was strangely heavy; the trees, the shrubs, the flowers, stood all in photographic stillness. The spirit of electricity

was in his chamber, making ready his weapons of war; and meanwhile the earth was hushed, waiting for his coming.

Throughout the afternoon the mighty forces were silently assembling; the sultry heat seemed well-nigh insupportable. Towards evening a black twilight gathered, enfolding all the earth as in a shroud. When Marjory had been dressed in her white frock, and had come again to her footstool in the drawing-room, she was obliged to move it close to the glass door, or she would not have been able to read.

She had reached the end of her story; she laid down the book, and looked out. Where was the brilliant blue, a week before so hard, so changeless? Oh, let earthly things seem as changeless as they may, it is only seeming! A canopy of angry blackness had overspread that smiling sky; the clouds which she had seen in the morning, snowy-white, stood out against it, copper-coloured now, fierce, grand, terrible. The trees, with their massive foliage, stood out also against a lurid background. It was as if nothing in nature had power, if anything had courage, to stir. When the door opened, Marjory started, and looked round in groundless apprehension.

Lady Thorne and Mrs. Vivian entered silently, approaching the open windows. The little old lady patted Marjory's head, and smiled with her usual quiet kindness; but Mrs. Vivian sank at once, without observing her, into the chair which she had occupied on the previous evening.

"What a fearful storm we are going to have!" she said nervously, as she gazed into the gathering darkness.

"It will clear the air," said Lady Thorne's serene voice; "We shall reap the benefit to-morrow."

"I would rather bear twice the heat than face it," murmured Mrs. Vivian. As she spoke, she was fanning herself languidly, as if her life were a burden; but her heavy eyes were fixed upon the sky, as by some fearful fascination.

"Hark!" she said suddenly.

A distant thunder-peal rolled over the heavens, echoing from side to side, then sinking into angry rumbles. Silence followed —utter silence; and the darkness deepened.

"Don't be afraid, mother!" said Hugh's bright young voice at the door; "Only think how jolly it will be to have a little cool weather!"

"We shall have to pay a terrible price for it," said Mrs. Vivian, shuddering.

"Not at all," said Hugh, cheerfully, seating himself on the window-sill at her side. "Suppose you lived in the tropics! An English thunder-storm would seem a mere nothing!"

"But we don't live in the tropics; and I am confident that I could never survive a tropical storm. I cannot imagine how it is possible for anyone whose nerves are not of iron."

Marjory meanwhile was looking at Mr. Hugh, and wondering that he should appear so light-hearted after his conduct of the morning. In his place, she thought, the prospect of the lightning would have filled her with terror—lest, as a fitting punishment, it should be permitted to strike her dead. What awful words she had heard from this young fellow, who sat here so unconcerned, looking carelessly at the thunder-clouds, and whistling a merry tune! Not wonder alone, but horror, moved her, not untinged by repugnance. He must be very wicked, she thought. Yes, in spite of his bright face, and his handsome eyes, and his look of youth and gaiety, he must be very wicked!

She was not much afraid of the storm herself; Lady Thorne's presence seemed protection. Serene, and gentle, and unmoved as ever was that little old lady, netting away at her old woman's shawl; drawing up her stitches with as much interest as if no awful forces were at work above her dwelling, ready, perhaps, to hurl on it destruction. Marjory shuffled her footstool a little nearer to the black satin gown, and, surreptitiously stretching forth her little hand, took fast hold of one of its soft folds. After this she felt quite safe and quite happy, come what would.

"Oh, what a flash!" cried Mrs. Vivian, raising her fan to her eyes. A minute later came another peal, reverberating long; and almost simultaneously a piercing shriek rang from overhead. The little old lady looked annoyed, continuing her netting; but Hugh sprang to his feet.

"Did you hear?" he cried. "Some one must be hurt! I'll go and see."

He was out of the room before Lady Thorne could speak; and there was a slight increase of the annoyance upon her face, as she observed:

"Jessie, I suppose. She is generally hysterical in a thunderstorm."

"That boy is absurdly tender-hearted," said Mrs. Vivian, with her usual languor. "Who else would trouble himself about a servant's panics? Lady Thorne, do you think that there is any hope of the storm's passing over?"

"Hardly, I fear," said the little old lady, raising her eyeglass. "The sky is very black over Alton; and, if there be any wind, it is in this direction."

"It is said, though, that a thunderstorm crosses the wind," returned Mrs. Vivian, as if feeling for a straw of deliverance. Her speech was cut short by a flash of fearful vividness, illuminating the whole room, and seeming to play around it—followed on the instant by a crash of stupendous thunder. Mrs. Vivian started from her chair.

"Where is Hugh?" she cried wildly; "Why does he not come back?"

She hurried towards the door, stretching out her hands.

"My dear Mrs. Vivian, do not distress yourself," said the little old lady, rising. "Pray sit down; we will have the blinds drawn and the shutters closed."

"Where is Hugh? where is Hugh?" repeated Mrs. Vivian, quite losing her self-

control. Apparently he had heard, for he met her at the door, entering hurriedly, his colour slightly raised. She flew towards him and threw herself into his arms.

"Oh, Hugh, my dearest boy! let us at least die together," Marjory heard her cry.

"Die! I don't mean to die yet, I can tell you," said the light voice. "Nor you either! Come back to your chair! Lady Thorne, might I ring the bell? If the lightning could be shut out——"

"I have rung," said the little old lady, returning to her place. Marjory's small hand closed once more upon the soft black satin; and the flash and the peal came again before the bell could be answered.

"It is the glorious God that maketh the thunder," said the little old lady's serene voice, as if the words rose involuntarily to her lips. Marjory thought of the children in heaven; and understood the secret of that entire calmness. But Mrs. Vivian shuddered all over; and her son, sitting upon the arm of her chair, passed his arm round her, while she buried her face in his breast.

He had no personal comprehension of her weakness: yet how tenderly he treated it!

"What a pity he is so wicked!" whispered

the child's busy little mind—"So wicked—and yet so kind! I never liked a wicked person before, but I can't help liking him. He cannot be all wicked, can he? it must be good to be like that to his mother. But Uncle John would say that no one who swore so terribly could get to heaven. Oh, what a pity it would be if he were shut out from Heaven!"

Her childish heart ached with a yearning pity as she looked at the kind, bright young face, and the strong young arm supporting his mother, and remembered those awful words which she had heard him speak. Somehow those words seemed burned into her mind; she could not forget them.

"How cruel of you to go away, Hugh"—said Mrs. Vivian, without raising her head—"and stay out of the room all that time, when you know what a thunderstorm is to me!"

"Why, mother, I was only gone two or three minutes. How could we tell that anyone was not hurt?"

He spoke laughingly, but with a little embarrassment: which the old lady, looking up from her netting, seemed to discern.

"It was Jessie who screamed, was it not?" she said.

"Yes; Jessie, half beside herself with fright. She was alone in the passage, upstairs, crouched down under that long window. She's a nervous little girl."

"Affected creature!" said Mrs. Vivian. "What extraordinary impertinence to scream in that way! I'm afraid, Lady Thorne, you spoil her."

"Now, mother, that's a downright shame. I should have thought that you could not help pitying her, when you are frightened to death yourself!"

"Why am I frightened? Simply because I realise the danger in a manner impossible to the blunt organisation of a servant? You speak of servants as if they had feelings like ourselves. They are creatures of a different order, and ought so to be treated."

"Did you see the form of that flash, Hugh?" said Lady Thorne. "It was a complete zigzag."

"How can you look at it?" cried Mrs. Vivian, clinging more tightly to her son. She did not raise her head until the curtains were closely drawn, and the cheerful light of candles had replaced the depressing gloom. The storm still raged with unwearied vehemence; after a while the wind began to rise, and then

came rain, heavy, fast-falling, beating passionately against the windows. In the midst of this appeared Bellhouse, composed like her mistress, and full of thoughtful consideration for the child, to summon her to bed.

"Don't you be alarmed, missy," said she, as they mounted the wide staircase, and a sudden gleam illuminated the skylight: "Thorne was never struck yet, so we may hope it never will be; it must have weathered a vast of storms before now. We're all in the hands of the Almighty, and in some ways sudden death would be a mercy—many's the time I've thought that."

"Is Jessie still frightened?" said Marjory.

"Ah, you heard her scream, I doubt! I fear her ladyship is sadly annoyed. Well! we all have our trials, Miss Stanhope."

With these words, of which Marjory did not perceive the point, they entered the large old bedroom. Here also candles were lighted, and curtains drawn; and Jessie, with an offended countenance, was sewing at a little table. Her colour was less radiant than usual; her eyes were tear-stained; and she held her head with the majestic air of an insulted princess. As her mother advanced,

she rose, collected the fragments of ribbon and lace on which she was occupied, and, closing her work-box with a snap, swept towards the door.

"Where are you going, Jessie?" said Bellhouse, in a deprecating tone.

"I am going to sit in the housekeeper's room," quoth Jessie, with dignity; and departed without looking back.

"Ah, I know what it will end in!" said Bellhouse; "Her ladyship will have to part with her."

She sighed heavily as she spoke, and shook her head: while Marjory gazed at her, half pitying, half perplexed. The child did not understand, and did not like to ask questions; she undressed in silence, Bellhouse attending on her in equal silence, and more than usually grave. Marjory was soon in bed, but her mind was too busy for sleep; her heart was very full, with an aching pain in it, thinking of Mr. Hugh. She was a child to whom, by nature as by training, unseen things were very real; and now the thunder rolling round the house, the awful gleams which pierced their way among the folds of the curtains, and glanced upon the wall, and then were gone, made those things seem

more than ever vivid. What would become of Mr. Hugh, if he went on being wicked? What would be the end of all that lightness and brightness?

And yet he might, if he would, be so different! If there were wickedness in him, there was also goodness; no one could doubt it, who saw him with his mother. The childish breast heaved, the blue eyes filled with anxious tears, as she pondered.

At length the storm was dying away; the rain was falling more gently; the thunder was rolling into far distance, lagging behind the flashes. But Marjory still turned restlessly from side to side. That heart-ache would give her no rest.

"Bellhouse," she said, suddenly.

"Why, I thought you were asleep, Miss Stanhope, my dear!"

"It's near eleven o'clock?"

"Yes, my dear," said Bellhouse.

"What do you do when you are worried about Jessie, and feel that you care so much for her, and yet you cannot help her, or make her good?"

"What strange things you say, to be sure, for a child, missy!" said Bellhouse. Then she paused a moment, her needle in her

hand, and looked straight before her: as though her homely eyes saw something far away. "I pray to the Almighty, my dear," she replied, very solemnly and slowly.

"Almighty!" It seemed to Marjory as if only now, for the first time, she understood that word.

She buried her face in the pillow, and whispered a little prayer:

"O Almighty God! bless Mr. Hugh, and make him good!"

Then, in her childish heart, she registered a vow that she would pray the same every night, so long as she should live.

CHAPTER XI.

"Heaven is about us in our infancy;
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy;
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy!"—*Wordsworth.*

A DAY of gentle summer rain followed the storm, again succeeded by radiant weather. Sad histories of disasters caused by the lightning appeared in the papers; hay-ricks had been fired, houses struck, men and beasts injured or killed. So every revolution in human affairs brings its share of suffering; but it is the few who suffer, the many who profit; and, the tempest over, then come calm and peace. The scorching heat had vanished, the oppression was gone; the sky was once more serene, but soft clouds tempered the brilliance of the blue; the coating of white dust had been washed from the hedgerows, from the flowers; green leaves had risen refreshed from their shower-bath, new buds on the wild rose-bushes replaced those scattered by the storm. The universal

thirst was satisfied; wild banks and garden-beds alike breathed fresh perfume; the birds once more sang in the trees; a new vigour stirred the world.

Marjory was out of doors all day, sitting or lying upon the grass with her book,—roaming in the park and plantations, picking flowers, watching the birds and insects, and singing to herself,—or occasionally driving with Lady Thorne in her low pony-carriage. A certain time every morning was spent in the old lady's private sitting-room, in reading the Psalms and lessons for the day, and repeating a portion of the Church catechism. In these observances the little old lady was exceedingly exact; but afterwards Marjory was free to drink in healing influences, in preparation for her return to privation and poverty among the red brick of Branksome.

The child could not bear the thought of such return; when it occurred to her, she put it quickly out of her head. Her uncle, Mr. Stanhope, had written full of gratitude to Lady Thorne, greatly relieved to hear of such safe provision for his young niece. His wife had had a slight relapse, and was forbidden to move at present. In a private note to Marjory, he added that a friend of

Aunt Lucy's had sent an opportune present of twenty pounds, to prolong her stay at the sea. This good news increased Marjory's happiness; and the happiness benefited her health. She began to grow rosy, to feel strong and full of life, as in the days before she came to Branksome—to run, jump, dance, instead of slowly walking, in her rambles through the park; to play at battledore and shuttlecock, and skip with an old rope which Bellhouse had hunted out; to race with the brown spaniel, Brush by name, who had conceived an obsequious affection for her. Brush's master was still at Thorne; the sudden illness of a relation had summoned his parents to a distance; and Mrs. Vivian had proposed that meanwhile he should make himself useful to Lady Thorne, who was entertaining a succession of visitors.

These visitors were a source of great amusement to Marjory, who watched them from afar. They were denizens of a world of which as yet she had had no experience—people of fashion, taking Lady Thorne in their way from London after the season—rich people, well dressed people, luxurious people, people who had never known the want of any thing that money could provide, who had lived all

their lives in high and smooth places, to whom such words as poverty, toil, pecuniary care, were empty sounds.

Marjory felt all the fascination of novelty, as she gazed into their lot—so different a lot from her own; so rich in new ideas, in unimagined delights. It did not occur to her to desire any share in that lot for herself; such a notion was too utterly wild to be entertained for a moment. But these glimpses of it had for her the marvellous charm of a pantomime. She gazed, and listened, and admired, and wove all manner of imaginations concerning these fine people, who had no idea of the impression they were producing upon the blue-eyed child, whom they met now and then upon the staircase, or happened to espy sitting alone in some obscure corner.

There was among them one old gentleman who took particular notice of her; but his stay was short—too short in her opinion, for she thought him a very nice old gentleman indeed. Mr. Hugh greatly puzzled her by remarking that the second "l" in his name—his name was Bulkley—must have crept in by mistake. She supposed that Mr. Hugh had some genealogical grounds for

the statement. Mr. Bulkley was a very large old gentleman, tall, and broad, and stout,—with an enormous nose, especially noticed by the child, and kind, twinkling eyes—the only small things about him. Marjory watched him drive away, with his two servants; and thought how very rich he must be to travel so accompanied: she wondered whether it were because stoutness prevented his doing anything for himself. She missed him when he was gone, and thought of him for long afterwards; for she was a grateful little child, and he had been kind to her.

Hugh Vivian was of untold service in entertaining the visitors. Many he already knew, and with the rest he was speedily at home. The young soldier well understood the art of fitting wings to an idle hour. The majority were a party of butterflies, and he was the chief butterfly among them; but in all his busy idleness he found time to be exceedingly kind to Marjory. One day he rode several miles to bring from his home a number of his own childish story-books for her amusement; another day he returned from Alton with a variety of toys—of much too juvenile a description, as the child, though

with grateful compunction, felt. Once he took her for a drive in his dog-cart; and it was well that Marjory was too ignorant to fear the capers of his steed, which, indeed, was only half broken. She never discovered her narrow escape of a broken neck—only regretting that Lady Thorne, hearing of the exploit, forbade its repetition. Often afterwards she came across Hugh in the course of her solitary rambles; and sometimes he would turn and walk with her, or sit down by her on the grass, amusing her with a story and himself with the spectacle of her old-fashioned simplicity.

One serene afternoon she found herself in a quarter of the park which she had never before visited. A shady row of elm-trees bordered a low green paling; and Marjory saw that on the other side lay the churchyard, the eastern end of the gray old church rising before her like a guardian of the graves. She had gone to the Church services regularly, with the little old lady; but they had driven by way of the road, mounting, finally, a flight of wooden steps which led to the west door—the principal entrance. Thus she had not known how far this old churchyard straggled away on the other side, ad-

joining the park : from which, indeed, it had originally been taken.

The child soon clambered over the paling, and stood among the quiet graves. Long shadows from the elms slanted across them ; grass, newly mown and fragrant, was strewn over the mounds. Southward the ground sloped gradually to meet a brook—the same which, a little while before, she had been so glad to discover. Here it was broad, though shallow, rippling peacefully over pebbles and watercress with gentle music, as if to lull the slumber of the dead. Marjory sat on a little heap of grass upon the bank, and rested. Summer insects hummed around her ; now and then a sparrow or a tomtit hopped over the graves, and eyed her curiously, its head on one side. The rustic chancel stood still and gray in the shade ; beyond the brook once more the park swards stretched beneath the ancient trees ; and on the far horizon rose a vision of dim hills. Sometimes a soft rustle stirred in the heights of the elms ; but for long no human sound broke the stillness.

At length heavy steps advanced from the gate of entrance. A woman, in a black gown and the cotton hood worn by all the country people, carrying in her arms a rosy-cheeked

baby of some eighteen months, came slowly round the church. She went straight, without observing Marjory, to a freshly-turfed grave, and, setting the child upon his feet, remained for many minutes in silence. Her back was turned; but Marjory, half awed, half pitying, saw that she was continually wiping her eyes, as she stood looking down upon the grave. The babe, meanwhile, was at play, highly pleased with the fragrant grass: which he gathered together by handfuls, and tossed into the air, laughing aloud. Presently he stumbled, and, falling, began to whimper. The woman turned to pick him up, and, seeing Marjory, dropped a curtsey.

She was quite a young woman; but her cheeks were worn, and her eyes dim, with crying; and Marjory, in her pity, began instantly to feel for a little purse, containing a florin which her uncle had sent to her from the twenty pounds.

"Is that your baby?" she asked, the money hidden in her hand.

"No, miss; not mine. I've brought him to see his father's grave."

Then she turned her back again, and again followed that silent wiping of the eyes. The baby struggled in her arms, stretching

his hands towards the grass, and crying, "Daddy! Daddy!" Setting him down, the woman caught sight of little Marjory's compassionate face, and said:

"He always calls 'Daddy,' miss, whenever he wants anything. His mother, her died when he was born; and his father brought him up and did for him all his life, till a fortnight agone; and then he was always for having the baby on his bed, till eight days agone yesterday, when he died."

"He was not ill long, then?" said Marjory.

"Oh, yes, miss, he'd been ailing a twelvemonth or more; only he would not give up till he was forced. It was a decline, if only we had known it; but he was always hopeful —and I'm sure I never thought but what he would get well when the hot weather was over. We was twins, miss, he and I; and he was my only brother."

She turned her back once more, and wept again in silence; and what could Marjory do but sit in silence also? Presently the baby said "Daddy! Daddy!" as before, and pulled the woman's dress.

"You wants your tea," she said, lifting him. "Poor little chap! — you knows nothing. If we could all forget like you, we

should be a deal happier! Now say 'Night, night, poor Daddy!'"

The child raised his head, and looked round with an expectant smile; evidently thinking, from these accustomed words, that his father was near. But the next moment a gay butterfly flitted past his eyes; and he jumped in the woman's arms, and crowed, and thought of his father no more.

"Good evening, miss," said the woman.

"Please buy something for the baby with this," said Marjory, rising in some embarrassment.

She hardly dared to offer her gift, fearing that even this *mighty* sum might be regarded with scorn, in the face of such a sorrow! But the woman took the coin greedily, dropping a lower curtsey; and saying, "Thank you, miss, I'm sure," with fervour. Then she went away down the mossy path; and Marjory was once more alone.

How still the new-made grave lay in the shadow! The woman's only brother! And he would never come out into the sun again, until the Judgment Day. A nameless apprehension stirred Marjory's heart; but it was gone in a moment.

"God would never take my Gerald from

me," she said to herself; "I am sure that He would not. He is too good!"

But she rose from her seat as she spoke, and wandered round the church—pausing here and there to read the rustic inscriptions on the tombstones: some of which were curiosities of quaintness, and many mis-spelt. Steps of a very different order from those of the woman, quick and light, and accompanied by a whistle, came up the wooden flight from the road. Mr. Hugh, followed as usual by Brush, stopped short with a laugh at sight of Marjory.

"You everlasting little party!" he cried; "Here you are again! Why, I meet you every day in some queer place or another. Are you meditating an edition of village epitaphs?"

"I came here by accident," said Marjory; "I did not know that the churchyard joined the park. I should like to see where Lady Thorne's children are buried; but I cannot find their names."

"Not here. Did you not notice their monuments on Sunday? The family vault is under the chancel."

"The family vault!" echoed Marjory, in an awestruck tone. "Were they there?—

Bellhouse's Miss Evie, and Master Archy, and that "beautiful baby," Miss Jane! She thought of the birds and flowers upon the nursery-walls, the little soft bed, the charming story-books; and [illegible]n of the contrast.

"Oh, why were t[illegible] put into that cold, dark place?" she cried; "I cannot bear to think of it."

"'*Noblesse oblige*,' you see," said Mr. Hugh, with a half smile.

"Nobleness obliges — what does that mean?" said Marjory.—"It is so delightful out here, with the green grass and the brook, and the blue sky, and the fresh air; I shouldn't mind it here," she added to herself.

"Yes, if one must be buried, I don't know a pleasanter spot for the unpleasant necessity," said Hugh: "But come! it is bad enough anywhere. Never mind! I have been to see the old parson, who was once my tutor; and I am going back across the park. You come with me, and I'll tell you a fairy tale. One should never think of disagreeable things before the time. That's my maxim; and you'd better make it yours."

"But this need not be disagreeable," said little Marjory; "I was forgetting! They are not in the vault; and they would not have

been here. And it is always summer weather in Paradise."

Then the child turned contentedly, smiling to herself as she followed Mr. Hugh along the shadow-bathed grass.

CHAPTER XII.

"The form, the form alone is eloquent!
A nobler yearning never broke her rest
Than but to dance and sing, be gaily drest,
And win all eyes with all accomplishment."

Tennyson.

It was late when they reached the house, and Mr. Hugh ran quickly up the shallow stairs, three at a time, to dress for dinner. Marjory, who was tired, followed more slowly, and was glad to find her tea prepared upon the round, old-fashioned table devoted of late to her use. Bellhouse was not in the room, although her work-basket stood in its usual place, and her chair was pushed slightly on one side as if only recently vacated. The child had finished her meal, and was curled up in the window-seat with a book, before her solitude was invaded; and then it was Jessie who entered — Jessie excited and flushed, with sparkling eyes.

"Come and cool yourself," said Marjory, making room in the window. "There's such a nice, soft little breeze! it comes on my cheek like a fan."

"Thank you, missy, but I feel too restless to sit still. I've heard such news! What do you think, Miss Stanhope? I'm going away."

"Going away!" repeated Marjory, in a pitying tone: "Oh, Jessie, how sorry I am!"

"You needn't be sorry, missy,—not for me. Poor mother will fret a bit, I dare say; but she'll soon get used to it, and I'll write to her regularly. I feel as if I could jump over the moon when I think of it! To get away from this stupid old hole—off 'on my own hook,' as the saying is — excuse me, miss, for being so vulgar! I shall hardly know myself!"

"Why, Jessie!" said Marjory, reproachfully: "I should have thought it would break your heart. This dear, beautiful place! How can you call it stupid?"

"To my mind, missy, it is beyond stupid; the very essence of dullness. And I've lived here all my life—never seen but this one corner of the world. To think of that, at my age! Nineteen! Why, lots are married at nineteen; and here am I, shut up here. Miss Stanhope, it is beyond my utmost hopes. Just now, when her ladyship told me, I felt

as if I could fall on my knees to thank her. As to looking sorry, or crying—that would have been sheer hypocrisy. Poor mother cried, and I'm sorry for *her :* I dare say, when I've a child of my own, I shall feel it hard when she wants to go off and leave me. But it's the way of the world," said Jessie, who was versed in modern fiction.

"Why are you going?" inquired the child: "Is Lady Thorne sending you away?"

Jessie bridled; this plain speaking touched her pride.

"Lady Thorne thinks it better, for my own good, Miss Stanhope. It was Mr. Hugh's doing. Yes, I owe eternal gratitude to Mr. Hugh!"

"What do you mean?" asked curious Marjory. Jessie was in a talkative mood, and rattled on, regardless of consequences.

"You remember the night of the storm, missy? I was frightened, and I screamed. I suppose it is no sin to scream; at least it's not brought home to my conscience! If Mr. Hugh chose to be officious, and come upstairs, how could I help it? Neither could I help his taking it upon him to cheer me up. I didn't ask it, and I didn't desire it;

and I didn't care whether or no mother heard what he said. None of it was of any consequence to me; though, all the same, I do not approve of mother repeating it to her ladyship. But it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good; and I shall have cause all my life to bless that storm."

"But Lady Thorne is so very kind! I should have thought that she would be glad for Mr. Hugh to comfort you."

"Yes, so you would, wouldn't you?" said Jessie, laughing. "But no, she regarded my fright as forwardness! and the best cure for this, she considers, is to send me away from this place, where I am so spoiled, and made to forget my humble station, missy."

"And where are you going?"

"To Miss Bulkley, Mr. Bulkley's sister,—a very rich lady in Hampshire. I'm to be half maid and half companion, read to her, attend to her birds and flowers, and go everywhere with her; she travels a great deal. Think of all I shall see! and this is the best of it,—when I'm once launched, started on my adventures, like Whittington, I can please myself about staying with Miss Bulkley. If I don't like that situation, I shall easily find another to suit me better. The world will

be before me, to pick and choose, when once I am off, Miss Stanhope."

The girl was looking into the glass as she uttered these words—an old-fashioned oval glass framed in oak, wherein her graceful head, with its crown of chestnut hair, and her fair young face, appeared like some exquisite picture. Joy and exultation danced in her eyes as she noted—who that saw could help noting?—how bright and clear they were, how lovely was the roseate tinting of the cheeks, how daintily chiselled every feature. Beneath that picture might well have been inscribed the motto, "My face is my fortune." That such was actually the case, she evidently felt: the words of the old song seemed hovering on her lips as she stood there in her glowing youth and beauty. Marjory gazed at her in innocent admiration,—mingled with a no less innocent wonder, as she saw that no touch of doubt or regret shaded that brilliant gladness.

"Shan't you be homesick, Jessie?" she said, after a meditative pause.

"Homesick!" repeated Jessie, with a quiet chuckle, as if the notion amused her: "I think I see myself homesick, after getting the first step of all I've wished for so long!"

"But, Jessie, suppose you could not help it?"

"In that case I must put up with it," said Jessie, laughing: "But I cannot suppose anything so foolish, missy."

At this moment the door was slowly opened, and Bellhouse came in, paler than Marjory had ever seen her. She sat down with forced composure, and drew her work-basket nearer to her chair; but, meeting from Jessie a glance half pitying, half apprehensive of an outburst, all self-restraint seemed suddenly to forsake her. Burying her face in her hands, she broke into passionate weeping.

While Marjory looked in alarm from mother to daughter, her colour rising, her blue eyes filling with responsive tears, Jessie for an instant stood irresolute, then knelt beside the chair.

"Now come, mother, don't take on so! don't, mother dear," she said, as soothingly as in her lay. "Why, mother, you've often said that all you cared for was my good; and only think how much for my good this will be. Why, I'm going to make my fortune, mother. Perhaps, when you see me again, I shall be a lady, and you'll feel so proud of me! Dear mother, do stop fretting."

"Oh, Jessie! oh, my Jessie!" sobbed Bellhouse, "Oh, that it should come to this! And I had hoped you would have gone on to take my place here, and be an honoured servant, loved and respected,—like your father and me, thank God. Oh, what a disappointment! And now I must part from you—you that I've never had out of my sight for a day since you were born! and that's nineteen years ago, my Jessie."

"Bellhouse, Jessie will try to be good; she will, indeed," said little Marjory, from the window.

"Yes, mother; you won't have any cause to be ashamed of me," said Jessie, proudly. "Even from your own way of looking at it, the change will be for my good: because, as her ladyship says, I've been made too much of; and where I'm going I shall be kept in my own place. So you can comfort yourself with that; and I'll comfort myself by looking forward to the future, when I shall come back to you as a lady, and take you to live with me; and then you shall have everything you could wish for, and you'll be glad I left Thorne; you see if that doesn't come true."

Bellhouse lifted her tear-stained face, and looked solemnly into the radiant eyes.

"Jessie," she said, "don't you buoy yourself up with any such a thought. You strive to do your duty in that state of life in which the Almighty has set you, and put all them foolish fancies out of your head:—however they got in there, I can't imagine! Yes, her ladyship is right: you've been the spoiled child of this house; where you're going you'll be treated as what you are—a hired servant; and that will be the best sobering you can have. But, oh that it wasn't needed, my Jessie! oh, how I shall miss you!"

Once more the woman, usually so calm, hid her face in uncontrolled wretchedness.

"Mother, you'll soon get used to it; it will be only at first. I shall be so happy! and I'll write every week. Dear mother, indeed—you'll soon get used to being without me."

"I shall never get used to it," said Bellhouse, suddenly drying her eyes with resolute self-mastery; "But I must look to the Almighty to strengthen me; as He strengthened her ladyship."

After this, although circumstances connected with Jessie's approaching departure were often discussed, Bellhouse displayed

no emotion; and, but for the above incident, that departure might have seemed a matter of indifference to Jessie's mother. Only, now and then, Marjory, awaking in the night, saw in the half-obscurity of the lamplight a quiet figure kneeling at the great armchair; and wondered, as she turned sleepily to her rest again, at the length of Bellhouse's prayers.

Meanwhile the child's happy visit had been extended to a month, and the harvest was growing golden in the fields around Thorne. She had begun to think with regret that she must soon be banished from this Eden Her aunt and uncle were coming back; and Mr. Stanhope had written to fix the day on which Marjory should rejoin them.

CHAPTER XIII.

"The stately homes of England,
How beautiful they stand
Amidst their tall ancestral trees,
O'er all the pleasant land!
The deer across their greensward bound
Through shade and sunny gleam,
And the swan glides past them with the sound
Of some rejoicing stream."—*Mrs. Hemans.*

"You look altogether a different child, missy, since you came to us. Your aunt will be quite pleased when she sees what a pretty colour you bring back on your cheeks," said Bellhouse.

Marjory smiled — a somewhat doubtful smile; and sighed in the same breath.

At this moment came a message to summon her to Lady Thorne's private room. The little old lady sat at her writing-table, an open letter before her.

"Marjory," she said, "I have lately had some correspondence with your uncle, which I have purposely postponed mentioning to you until the matter was settled. How

should you like to return to a home in the country?"

There was no doubt about Marjory's answer to this inquiry. Its cause was quickly made plain. A small benefice in the patronage of a friend of Lady Thorne, had lately fallen vacant; and the patron, being abroad at the time, and having a high opinion of the old lady's judgment, had invited her to recommend a fitting candidate for the office. Lady Thorne had gladly availed herself of the opportunity to assist Marjory's uncle; and, due inquiries having proved his character and parochial abilities to be alike beyond praise, she had received from her friend authority to offer to him the living. It need hardly be said that this offer,—with such thankfulness as a conventional note could ill convey—had been accepted.

And now the child, in gladness too great for speech, listened to such particulars as Lady Thorne could give concerning her future home. It was not "a good living;" they would still be poor: though almost rich in comparison with the past. But it comprised a comfortable house, a garden and an orchard: which in themselves seemed wealth enough to Marjory after all that had gone

before. Then the parish was agricultural, in a beautiful country, the air healthy, the church close to the house. There would be fields and lanes in which she might roam to her heart's content; the books would be unpacked; there would be no more red brick: it would be home—a real home.

"Oh, how delightful! how delightful!" cried Marjory, finding words at length. The mere sight of that happy little face was more than recompense to the old lady, looking on with her grave smile.

Then away, with a hop, skip, and jump, darted the child, to pour out her heart to Bellhouse, and after Bellhouse to Mr. Hugh, for whom she searched high and low until she found him. Afterwards, in her favourite hiding-place under the weeping ash, she scribbled, with a lead pencil and three sheets of straw paper, an exuberant letter to Gerald. She would hardly have been known for the same child as the worn and weary little Marjory who had stolen in through that white park-gate, and laid herself down beside the brook. Her last week at Thorne was the happiest of all that happy time; for with present enjoyment were blended a whole multitude of plans and prospects for the future.

Towards the end of this week Mr. Hugh returned to his home; and Lady Thorne, with little Marjory, accompanied him, to spend a long day at Copelands. They started soon after breakfast, in the open carriage, the staid old coachman and butler upon the box, Hugh Vivian on his beautiful chestnut riding by their side. It was one of those halcyon days in late summer, when the earth seems overladen with bounty; when the orchards are full of ripening fruit, the fields of goldening corn, the hedges rich in promise of nuts and blackberries, the woods heavy with foliage at its prime, its early freshness replaced by luxuriance of colour. As Marjory looked around her, her young heart bounded with joy in the beauty and the glory; she sat silent, but the light in her blue eyes was more eloquent than words.

The road wound with the windings of the river, among orchards and hopyards, with a background of hill and wood. From the remarks which at times passed between Lady Thorne and the attendant horseman, Marjory gathered that this fruitful landscape was a part of Mr. Vivian's territory—one day to become his son's. The child, nurtured in poverty, looked at Mr. Hugh, riding along with his

usual careless grace; and thought how strange it must be to feel oneself the lord, or at least the future lord, of such an expanse. Mr. Hugh himself seemed to have no particular feeling on the subject! He rode on, taking life as he found it, his look and manner those of one who has begun with existence to command, to find circumstances and people bow before him, and form to his wishes: to whom this condition is too much, of course, to give occasion for pride,—his natural inheritance, which neither himself nor any other had imagined it possible to be otherwise.

"Lady Thorne, there's one thing I wish you would scold my father about! He will wage war on the timber. Why, my own peculiar oak in the south shrubbery, the first and the last I ever climbed,—even that, when I came home this time, was gone. It is quite a mania with him. Do tell him of it."

"My dear Hugh! how can you suggest such an impertinence? What right have I to tell him of anything of the kind?"

"Oh, he is always crying up your wisdom. And I should have thought this was a point to interest you; you take such religious care of your own trees."

"Yes, they seem to me like old friends,"

said the little old lady. "But your father and I are two! Besides, he has enough and to spare."

"He will not, soon, if the present havoc goes on. I mean to beg him, as a particular favour, before I go back, to curb his pruning propensities. That fellow of ours, that bailiff, is such a slasher! Perhaps he has some relation in the timber trade who gets our wood cheap; I'll give my father a hint of it," said Hugh, with his careless laugh,—"There! I always think that this is the finest view of the house."

They had rounded a sweep, and at some distance, flanked by extensive shrubberies, rose on the summit of a series of terraces, descending by steps to the river, the battlemented front of a grand old mansion—which no one driving along this part of the road could fail to observe, or, observing, admire, as one of England's most "stately homes." Hugh looked pardonably proud of it, as, sitting lightly on his saddle, he drank in the prospect.

"It's a jolly old place, isn't it?" he said, laughing again from mere gaiety of heart. "I think I may say in a double sense, 'There's no place like home.' You forgive me, Lady

Thorne? If Thorne were my home, I should feel the same for that."

"They are both goodly heritages," said the little old lady, with her grave smile. Then she was silent,—thinking perhaps that to her there was "no place like" another Home, where her husband and her children were waiting. Meanwhile Hugh's chestnut was growing impatient, in anticipation of his own stable; his master, raising his hat in adieu to the carriage, gave him his way, and was quickly out of sight. The sober old equipage followed at a pace more suitable to its appearance; and Hugh was standing with his mother on the upper terrace, when it rolled at length to the door.

Mrs. Vivian looked as handsome and as haughty as ever, but in better spirits than at Thorne. She was rejoiced to have her son with her once more; and, in her gladness of heart, gave for the first time her whole hand, instead of two fingers, to Marjory, as the child followed Lady Thorne. Otherwise, she as usual ignored the existence of this *protégée* of Lady Thorne—who had a hobby for taking up nameless individuals. Marjory, not having yet arrived at the comprehension of slights, enjoyed herself none the less; and wandered

about as at Thorne, exploring, imagining, living her own life, and making mental notes on all that she saw. She was not ignored by her friend Mr. Hugh, whom she accompanied on the round of his accustomed haunts; to the stables, which, with the horses, he sharply inspected; the kennels, where, with the eye of a connoisseur, he criticised a litter of pups; the head keeper's cottage, where she saw a nursery of young pheasants; finally to the river, the condition of which he examined with a view to fishing. Everywhere he had the aspect, the eye and tone, of a master; a master good-natured, but imperious, whose birthright it was to rule, possess, enjoy. Everywhere the various orders of that quick, bright young voice were received with deferential homage; everywhere he seemed to Marjory as a prince, admired and adored.

The elder Mr. Vivian did not appear until the party were assembled at luncheon, when he entered the room by a side-door, shaking hands hurriedly with Lady Thorne, and excusing his lateness on the plea of important letters. He was a small, spare man, of middle height, shortened by an habitual stoop. Marjory gazed in wonder at the wrinkles that furrowed his brow, which was

scantily shaded by thin brown hair sprinkled with gray. He looked ill and full of care, and, to the child's eyes, peevish. Still, even his face brightened as it turned towards his son; his voice, somewhat harsh and dry in general, seemed to soften when he spoke to Hugh,—who, in his turn, treated his father with a respectful deference pleasant to behold. All that was best and worthiest in him rose to the surface in his intercourse with his parents. If he were spoiled, they did not suffer by it. To them he was always unselfish and considerate; and no one who observed him now could wonder that in their eyes he was a paragon among sons.

After luncheon, Marjory stole out of doors again, escorted by Brush, who, on finding himself once more in his own domains, had assumed an air of lordly importance. When she was tired, she sat by the river-side, and revelled in a fresh heap of books: with which Mr. Hugh, on her departure, presented her, to her intense delight. Altogether this was a day to which Marjory long looked back as a bright spot in her childhood. For the first time in her life she was present at the late dinner, all eyes and ears. Soon afterwards, the carriage rolled again to the

door; and she set forth alone with Lady Thorne.

She felt very sorry to say good-bye to the kind young soldier, so often her companion of late; but she was too happy, too full of pleasure in the gift of books, for any poignant sadness. As the carriage drove away, she looked back upon a picture which she carried away in her mind. The old mansion, all its windows shining in the light of the setting sun; the same light slanting peacefully upon the group gathered on the terrace—Mr. Vivian, standing motionless, very small and shrunken in his black evening dress; Mrs. Vivian, waving her fine white hand with languid grace; Brush, wagging a deprecating tail, as to apologise for remaining; and, in the midst of this circle, Mr. Hugh, as usual brimful of life—light-hearted, easy-going life—making some laughing remark to his mother, and nodding a gay farewell to the child, as her blue eyes gazed back at him. So the carriage rolled down the slope, and away; and Copelands and its inhabitants passed from Marjory's sight. The air was full of sweet scents, and the sky of crimson glories; when these faded, a golden harvest moon arose, and lighted the travellers home.

Two days later, Marjory returned to Branksome. Her little heart ached sorely when it was time to say good-bye; she looked all round the dear old-fashioned room where she had found such sweet rest, then clasped her arms tightly about Bellhouse's neck, and cried upon her shoulder.

"Good-bye, my dear—good-bye, my little missy. May the Almighty bless you wherever you go!" said Bellhouse, kissing her tenderly.

Marjory could find no reply but a sob; and the carriage was waiting.

Downstairs she tried to thank Lady Thorne for her great kindness; but, with the effort, forth afresh welled choking tears. The little old lady patted her on the shoulder, saying gently, "Never mind, my child; I know." And Marjory's last look met her serene eyes watching from the window in kindly regret. Then the child opened a little envelope which the old lady had left in her hand, and found within a five-pound note—riches too wonderful to be realised at present.

Leaning back among those luxurious cushions, Marjory retraced the way which, five weeks before, she had travelled slowly and painfully through the burning sun upon her own little feet. She noticed every turn

in the road; the sycamore beneath which she had sat—the last glimpse of Thorne, which had been her first, a gleam among distant trees. Thenceforth the way seemed sadly short until red brick began to reappear: the same houses in process of erection, the same suburban villas. Behold the Baptist chapel—still staring! and the clock-faced church; finally, the slated roof of Mrs. Hammond's lodgings. A moment later, the two fat horses had paused before the little gate; in several adjacent windows surprised spectators admired the unwonted vicinity of a carriage and pair. The footman opened the door for Marjory, and carried her little box up the narrow path.

"So here you are at last, Miss Marjory!" said Mrs. Hammond's well-known voice. Aunt Lucy's delicate face appeared in the background, lighted by a greeting smile. "Is she come?" said Uncle John from an upper room.

The child's conscience smote her for her sadness; she ran to meet them.

Meanwhile the footman had already resumed his station on the box; the coachman turned with ponderous care; the carriage rolled away: and this episode in Marjory's life was over.

CHAPTER XIV.

"He had felt the power
Of Nature, and already was prepared,
By his intense conceptions, to receive
Deeply the lesson deep of love which he
Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught
To feel intensely, cannot but receive."—*Wordsworth.*

AFTERNOON lessons were over in Miss Somerville's school; and the flock of girls, of all ages and sizes, were turned loose to disport themselves in the playground. Hither and thither over the grass-plats, up and down the gravel paths, they ran, racing,—skipping, singing, enjoying to the utmost their freedom.

"Lina, Lina, demandez si nous pouvons parler Anglais!" cried one of the merry creatures, all arms and legs, in the early stage of teens: "Nous ne pouvons pas enjouir votre compagnie dans cet horrible Français! Demandez vite! Miss Somerville ne peut pas vous refuser!"

"She would certainly prefer English to such French as that," said the person

addressed, smiling with a touch of conscious superiority.

"Vous lui demanderez, n'est-ce pas? vous chère, très-chère Lina!" cried the female hobbledehoy, clinging round her friend. The young lady gently disengaged herself, with the same quiet smile, and proceeded to grant the request; returning shortly with a favourable answer.

"Oh, be joyful! friends and compatriots, listen! English! English! our blessed mother-tongue!" cried the girl, running wild: "Come, every one, and thank Lina. We may talk English for a whole hour! come, every one of you!"

The girls collected in a flock, installing the visitor upon a garden-seat beneath a sunny wall. Five crowded with her into the seat; the rest sat about, some on the grass, some on a wheelbarrow left by accident in the path: while all, with greater or less admiration, gazed upon Lina, their centre.

"You are not to speak, miss! not even to come near her," shouted the wild girl to a schoolfellow who had been detained in the house, and who now approached, running eagerly over the turf: "You are going to take her away, and keep her all to yourself

for hours; but you shall not rob us of this brief interlude of bliss."

"Very well, I'll sit here, and say not a word; only I suppose I may listen," said the new comer, laughing, as she paused in the background of the group.

"You may listen if you keep your condition,—not one word, mind!" cried the girl, shaking her finger. "Now, Lina, begin! tell us everything you can think of, about all that you have done and seen, since we saw you last."

A tumult of chatter followed; the young lady, indeed, always self-possessed, quiet, and dignified, but her quondam schoolfellows vying with one another in ejaculations, comments, and questions. These last the visitor would have found too numerous for reply, had she not evidently resolved to notice only such as she deemed sensible enough to deserve it.

Meanwhile, the girl in the background faithfully fulfilled her promise; sitting absorbed and meditative, her eyes fixed upon the principal figure of the group, as if comparing it with preconceived notions. No one who had watched the ways of little Marjory could fail to recognise, in this

seventeen-year-old schoolgirl, the observant interest, the absorption in things without herself, which had characterised that child of the past. Yes, it was the same face, not very much older, and hardly less simple, than of yore; and the thoughtfulness which had sat strangely on the brow of the child, seemed only a foreshadowing charm of womanhood in the maiden. The thought had deepened with the years; the steadfastness had intensified. Something there was in that young face of well-nigh inspiration, which stirred, or might stir, those who looked upon it; something which spoke, though silent, of work, of life, of power. But it was unconscious power, free from any taint of egotism or conceit. Childlike as of old, the blue eyes gazed upon Lina, much as they had gazed on Mr. Hugh, on Jessie, on the visitors at Thorne. The square brow was still clear and open, the bright hair shone in certain lights with the old yellow gleam. Was it a pretty face?—one could hardly tell; but it was beautiful with the highest order of beauty—such as could never spring from physical charms alone.

For the rest, Marjory was still "a growing girl," somewhat thin, though perfectly

healthy,—long in limb, slight and supple in figure. Her dress was but slightly altered from the cotton frocks of old; in fact, she wore a cotton frock at this moment, differing only in its long skirts from that in which little Marjory had travelled from Alton to Thorne. Moreover, she had still a holland jacket and an old straw hat; and still looked as thorough-bred a lady, despite the plain attire, as she had looked at ten years old, when the cabman had touched his hat to her.

The girl who formed the centre of the admiring crowd, was two years older than Marjory. She had left Miss Somerville's school a year ago, and was now only here for a flying visit *en route* to some further destination. The blue eyes fixed upon her beheld a face and form worthy of a princess; a Spanish princess she might have been, only that her hazel eyes lacked the fire usually attributed to southern beauty. They were undoubtedly fine eyes, but steady and calm, according well with the dispassionate cast of features: which, but for their glowing olive, might have been carved in marble,—so still they were, so unvarying in expression. It was a classical face, in some degree a noble face, only the forehead was a little too narrow,

and the smile, when it came, too cold; but these deficiencies were seldom noticed in the admiration excited by the rare beauty and dignified grace.

In figure, Lina was finely developed, erect, and of faultless proportions; her dress also was perfect, fashionable without showiness, the colours well assorted, the materials good. The young schoolgirls evidently regarded her with lavish admiration. Always an oracle, she had now returned to them rich in experiences from the great outer world; and found herself on a higher pinnacle than before. It was clear that she accepted this position as a matter of course, using it to exert a salutary influence over her youthful friends. Her conversation was like her face,—calm, superior, all that it ought to be. How good she was! what a pattern! an angel almost, thought the schoolgirl mind.

Meanwhile, Marjory was still deep in observation. Time was when she also had thought thus of Lina; when Lina had been to her a standard of excellence, her actions perfect, her opinions infallible. Ever since leaving Branksome, nearly seven years ago, Marjory had lived with her uncle and aunt in their rural parsonage. Eight miles from the

nearest town, three from the nearest station —no squire, no society—a population of agricultural labourers, with three or four middle-class farmers: such was the nature of the parish, Rockswold by name. The beauty of hill and dale, of wood and sky, compassed the place about. Day and night, spring and summer, autumn and winter, in their accustomed round, made each fresh loveliness. Surely the earth is beautiful no less for God than for man! At this moment still places lie in multitudes, unnumbered and unknown,—on Alpine heights, in tropical wilds, in ocean depths,—exquisite beyond man's conception; and year by year, though man knows nought of them, they are renewed with the renewing of the spring.

Rockswold itself, for any human appreciation, might almost have been one of these spots. To the farmers the sky was but a vehicle to weather, and the land to crops and cattle. The labourers plodded year by year through their accustomed routine, their minds apparently only one degree less dense than the clay in which they toiled. The mistress of the village shop dispensed her goods at usurious prices, and gossiped with the rustic women who came to buy. The

blacksmith, her neighbour, gossiped likewise —and that of the most vulgar and petty concerns, despite the poetic rhythm of his anvil. Meanwhile, around them, the sun rose and set in glory unutterable; the woods stretched along the sides of the hills in ever-changing beauty; daily these people beheld scenes which, by faithful copying alone, might immortalise an artist; but their eyes were closed that they could not see, and their perceptions that they could not comprehend. So at least it appeared—one cannot say more;—a painful mystery to Marjory.

For to Marjory the things of nature were a mighty influence. She had grown up among them as their pupil, learning perpetually, catching yearly a more vivid reflection of their simplicity, their freedom, their freshness. She had watched the changes in earth and sky until she had become as "weather-wise" as any farmer; she could tell each wild bird's note and nest, each flower's favourite haunt; the ways of the wild bees and ants; the special characteristics of countless insects, whose names in science were unknown to her. Her solitude, and her limited range of books, had left her thoughts free,—original at least, so far as that

they were her own thoughts, many of which had come to her when alone in the woods or fields, and not second-hand from others. But therewith her respect for her uncle's teaching kept her safe "in the old paths." So far, young Marjory had been shielded from any knowledge of those doubts with which the minds who live in a cluster are in these days so busy. Her simple faith in the Almighty Father and his Son, "by Whom He made the worlds"—made all this beauty amid which she lived—had never been tried or shaken. There was not even any dissent in the place; the church, with its ivy-covered tower, and its bells, of which the parish was proud, stood like a friend beside her home; and she could have sooner imagined, or, if put to the test, desired, that home altogether closed to her than her, affections to that old church and the forms of its worship. Her reverence for these things had become a part of her life—unspoken, but deep beyond speech.

Of romance, commonly so called, the child knew nothing. She had mixed little with other girls; and, until she was sixteen, not at all. She had her own thoughts, now and then,—very rarely,—upon the subject of love.

She regarded it much in the same light as some beautiful but mysterious poem, some strain of music, intricate, but solemn and sweet: much, in fact, as she regarded the stars in her beloved sky—those shining worlds, so far, so full of wonder. As concerned herself personally, she had never dreamed of the possibility of marrying; or of spending her life in any way but as a companion to Gerald. Life with Gerald, and for Gerald—keeping his house, soothing his cares, sharing his pursuits, working for him and for them—this was her dream.

Her uncle had taught her all that she knew of solid subjects, supplemented by French and music from her aunt, until, about eighteen months before the present date, she became a day-boarder at Miss Somerville's school: which fever and deficient drainage in the county town had driven to take refuge, with all its staff, in this fresh and healthy spot. For some time before joining their lists, Marjory had felt keen interest in the colony thus imported. Girls—creatures like herself!—when she could not see them, she thought of them, weaving stories and building castles concerning them, in her active brain. When she met them in their daily promenade,

two and two, along the lanes, she would stand aside to watch them pass, taking note of every face, and forming her own ideas of its character. But it was the face of their leader which specially bewitched her, working as a charm upon her beauty-loving imagination.

By degrees an ideal halo transformed that image into "a vision bright with something of an angel light." Una in the "Faëry Queene," Verena in "Sintram," every pure and sweet and lovely female character of which she had read, was by turns personified for Marjory in this maiden, to whom as yet she had never spoken. She dreamed of her by night, and moved by day in an inspired atmosphere created by her vicinity. All the capacity for romance which in many girls is less innocently expended, was thus devoted by Marjory. At church the school occupied a small transept opposite Marjory's seat; and, as her blue eyes rested upon that calm and finely chiselled face, it seemed to her that her spirit of devotion was deepened, her power to praise and to pray intensified by its presence.

It was with trembling delight that Marjory entered upon a closer acquaintance with this

object of adoration. She found that the young lady's name was Caroline, otherwise Lina, Peele; and that governesses and girls alike regarded her as a mysteriously perfect character. A few confided to Marjory, who was soon at home among all, an opinion that she was indeed too perfect! but the majority viewed her with unquestioning esteem. She was not slow to discover Marjory's feelings; and regarded them with favour. Few of the girls were high in social status; and, although well educated, they lacked that air of breeding which prominently distinguished Marjory. Lina, though merely the daughter of a provincial bank-manager, was herself of fastidious refinement; and found Marjory's society more congenial than any other in her school-life. A close intimacy was quickly established. Mr. and Mrs. Stanhope were glad to find so excellent a friend for their niece; and it became a weekly institution for Lina to spend the Wednesday's half holiday at the vicarage.

The two girls walked backwards and forwards through the quiet field-paths, discussing many subjects which to Marjory had hitherto been only food for solitary cogitation. The younger girl heard with enthusi-

asm Lina's views, receiving them as gospel; read with avidity Lina's favourite books; and sought upon every doubtful matter Lina's advice. This advice was always prompt, always decided: that it could err was as yet undreamt of by Marjory. She unfolded to this acquaintance of a month or two her secret visions concerning Gerald; and much else never before breathed to any human being. Whether her own enthusiasm were equally shared by Lina, she never questioned; or, rather, she took the fact for granted: and thus the first half-year of her schooling passed away. Lina did not return after the holidays; her education was said by Miss Somerville to be satisfactorily completed. She had gone forth, to be to the school a lasting credit.

Marjory mourned her sorely, and could hardly realise that it was not a year since her first vision of that idealised face, not five months since their first personal acquaintance. No one among her schoolfellows could supply to her Lina's place; she soon resumed that independent life which had been of late suspended. She had seen with Lina's eyes, and heard with Lina's ears, during that infatuated dream of friendship:

now, by degrees, she found herself questioning whether, on all points, she agreed with Lina so utterly as she had supposed. Thence arose varied perplexities, to satisfy which she searched right hand and left; and began for the first time to perceive how wide is the world, how many phases life contains, how many sides exist to every subject. After a while she began, moreover, to wonder that Lina's opinions should be so decided, on points so numerous and weighty—points on which older and greater minds could only plead their craving for enlightenment. It was less than a year since she and Lina had parted, but during this time Marjory had gained far more than an ordinary year in thought and feeling.

And now "the merry month of May" had come again; another month would bring the midsummer holidays: and then Marjory herself was to leave school. She had climbed to the head, and knew all that Miss Somerville could teach; but Marjory did not feel her education to be finished: far, very far, from that! It seemed to her she had but just found out how much she had to learn. She would only exchange one school for another: that of daily life and of the world.

CHAPTER XV.

"The Past and Present here unite
Beneath Time's flowing tide,
Like footprints hidden by a brook,
But seen on either side."—*Longfellow.*

Lina had come, as we have said, on a flying visit to her former governess: whom Marjory had begged to spare her for the evening, as in old times, to the vicarage. And now, while the soft spring day declined, and amber lights began to gather in the west, Marjory, waiting, gazed intently upon her quondam idol—comparing the present with the past, and, in fact, studying Lina. She was aware of having previously seen her through an imaginary medium; now she desired to see her as she was—to know how much or how little the true Lina resembled the Lina of those dreams. Somehow the enchantment had faded. Here was the same face,—only a little older, a little more dignified, and immovable in expression; but these were not the same eyes that looked upon it. Marjory blamed her own fickleness, as she

acknowledged the change; yet she was forced to acknowledge it.

"Are you ready, Marjory? I think we ought to start," said Lina, looking at her watch. Marjory coloured to and above her blue eyes, as if Lina could divine her thoughts; and started from the grass. The other girls endeavoured to detain their friend; but she was firm; and, as she withdrew her hand from the last imploring clasp, the bell rang loudly in the doorway.

"Bother the bell," cried the wild girl, stamping on the ground: "Now for washy tea and bread-and-scrape and that wicked French! while Marjory goes off and enjoys herself. Mind you send Lina back in proper time, Marjory, or I'll—I'll—I don't know what, to you!"

Marjory returned a laughing reply over her shoulder, as she walked to the entrance-gate by Lina's side; but Lina observed:

"How boisterous that Mary Carr has grown! she is really quite unladylike."

"Not in her mind," said Marjory; "only a little in her manners; and she is so much devoted to you, that your coming turns her head. She has counted the days to this visit."

"It is fortunate that I shall not be here long; I might fall in her favour! I could not long resist telling her my opinion. Well, Marjory! how have you been getting on? Your letters have been hurried lately."

"I have been very busy; and I knew that I should see you soon. There is so much I have been storing up to say when we met,—and now we shall have so little time! I wish you could stay a little longer."

"It is impossible. I am due at Dover, at my sister's, the day after to-morrow; and even there my visit will be limited. I must be at home to help mamma in the moving."

"You are going to move?" exclaimed Marjory: "You never told me that!"

"It was not finally decided until last week. Yes, ever since my father's death, we have disliked Bullingham; but circumstances made it desirable to remain there for a time. Now this seems no longer necessary; and mamma thinks that she may as well live in, as let, the house which has been left to her."

"Oh, yes! you told me of that house; but you did not mention the place, Lina. Where is it?"

"It is at Alton; in a pretty square, at the opposite end, I regret to say, to the cathe-

dral,—but near a very nice church. I went with mamma to see the place. I said nothing to you, because our plans were then so unsettled."

"And the house is at Alton!"

Back seven years into the past was Marjory in a moment. She saw again the red-brick suburb, the clock-faced church, Mrs. Hammond's hot little rooms: a white road stretched before her, the sky was blue, there was a scent of wild roses and sycamore flowers; she was a child again, travelling wearily along the road to Thorne.

"Well, Marjory, what have I said to drive you into an absent fit?"

"Alton! It was the thought of Alton. Oh, Lina, don't you remember all that I told you about our time there, and my adventure, and Thorne?"

"Yes, by-the-by, I do remember something; but not distinctly. I did not realise that you were at Alton itself. You called the place Branksome."

"Branksome was the suburb where we lodged. It joined Alton; but in some ways it was like a separate place. The cathedral seemed miles away to me; it was really a mile and a half, and Uncle John had only

once time to take me there; he would not let me walk alone in the town."

"Stay a moment," said Lina: "Let me recollect! Yes, I am sure of it; our square must be close to that Branksome. The woman in charge of our house spoke of Branksome Church; I did not know why,—for its real name is St. Philip's."

"St. Philip's! That was the very church where Uncle John did duty! Oh, Lina, how curious; how it all comes back! To think that you are going to live there. Only, you said it was a nice church. Now I am sure you would not call St. Philip's nice."

"It was hideous outside——"

"A great clock stuck in the face?"

"Yes, a most ugly clock."

"Oh, then, it is our very own St. Philip's!" cried Marjory, clapping her hands: "How wonderfully things come round."

"I cannot say that I see anything wonderful in this. It is merely a coincidence. As to the church, it has been restored,—inside, at least. The old vicar died three years ago, and the new one has changed everything. The seats are all free; there are all the proper services, a staff of priests, who live in a clergy-house—a sisterhood, and

everything correct. That is one of the chief attractions to me. I would far rather be near a church of that kind than the cathedral."

"It must be changed, indeed," said Marjory, dreamily. "There were pews with doors, I remember, in those old days. And service only on Sundays, and Thursday evenings. Uncle John did wish that he could have one on Saints' days; but he was told that it would not do."

"The present vicar, Mr. Throckmorton, is not one who considers whether a thing will or will not 'do,'" said Lina: "He has what is right, without consulting anybody's opinion."

"Uncle John was only a *locum tenens*, you see. He could not manage things as if he been the vicar."

"I feel sure that Mr. Throckmorton would not accept a *locum tenency* where he could not obey his conscience," said Lina, decidedly. At another time Marjory might have fired in her uncle's defence; but now, full of her own reminiscences, she did not observe the comparison.

"Perhaps you will see Lady Thorne, Lina? If you should, I hope you will tell me. I

have so often longed to hear of her. Her friend, the old patron of this living, died the year after we came here; so I have had no opportunity of asking about her, or Bellhouse, or any of them. Oh, I do wonder how they all are—Lady Thorne, Bellhouse, Jessie, Mr. Hugh! Perhaps you will see Mr. Hugh too. He told me that he was often in Alton. I suppose he is a grand country gentleman now,—married to Lady Rose Fairlegh, very likely."

As these last words were spoken, a slight change of expression—a shadow, touched by repugnance—flitted over Lina's face. It passed instantly, replaced by the usual calm; but Marjory remembered to have seen it before. Her curiosity was awakened.

"Lina, why do you dislike my speaking of Mr. Hugh?"

"How can you tell that I dislike it?" asked Lina, quickly.

"I saw it in your face—not only now; the very first time I mentioned him, long ago at school, you had that same look, as if his name were hateful to you."

"I must command my face better," said Lina, smiling: "But you are right, Marjory. His name is hateful to me—only his name,

of course. It reminds me of another Hugh Vivian, who once did us a great wrong—a wrong I can never forget."

"And he had the same name! I wonder if they were related."

"Oh, no, impossible! The person whom I mean was in a very different position. He was a clerk in the bank at Bullingham."

"And Bullingham is in Hampshire, too—far away from Alton. I am sorry the name is so disagreeable to you, though. If you get to know my Mr. Hugh, perhaps he will make you like it."

"I think not," said Lina, quietly; "I could never like it. Besides, there is no probability of my knowing him; we shall not expect to be in the county society."

"Is the Hugh Vivian who did the wrong still at Bullingham?" said Marjory.

"No, he disappeared, no one knew where; he was altogether 'a black sheep.' I spoke incorrectly just now, Marjory, when I said that I could never forget that wrong; I meant, the fact of his having committed it. The particulars of it, I never knew: only their consequences."

"Poor Lina! I am so sorry," said Marjory, in vague pity. As she spoke, with a caress-

ing movement, she passed her arm through her friend's; for a look of real pain had fallen upon Lina's beautiful face.

"Never mind," replied Lina, ignoring the movement: "There is no use in recalling the past. I will only say that it was something connected with my brother."

Marjory ventured no further questioning. Lina, like herself, had had one beloved brother: whose relations with her—so Marjory fancied—had resembled her own with Gerald. Lina had occasionally spoken of him, as of one whom she unutterably revered, but who had been involved in some unfortunate mystery; he had suffered in some way, sadly—not through his own fault. This was all that Marjory had gathered concerning him: excepting that he was dead.

"I won't mention Mr. Hugh again, Lina."

"Impetuous as ever, Marjory," said Lina, smiling. "Pray mention him as much as you please; it can make no difference to me. My feeling about the name is a mere weakness, which I do not wish to indulge."

But Marjory hastened to change the subject, dreading to pain her friend, from whatever cause that pain might proceed; and the

conversation had soon wandered far from Thorne or Alton. Soon, also, the two companions, climbing the last stile, found themselves in the orchard, now gay with blossom, which adjoined the shady garden of the vicarage.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Viewless things his eyes can view,
Driftings of his dream do light
All the skies by day and night,
And the seas that deepest roll
Carry murmurs of his soul."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

While the quiet days rolled by in the old country vicarage, and Marjory grew with steady growth, reading, observing, thinking, her brother Gerald had already taken his post in life's great battle.

His childish dream of becoming an artist, had intensified until it consumed him as a fire. Visions of ideal beauty constantly haunted him, craving painfully for development. Often at night, when the house was still, he would sit long at his window, looking out towards the heights of space and the sleeping world below, and feeling within him something that throbbed and struggled towards the Infinite, whence it came. At such times, in his earlier boyhood, tears would roll unconsciously down his cheeks; he could not have told why. As years went on, the

tears ceased; he grew too manly for such relief; but none the less powerful was that by which they had been excited. Bereft of even such outlet, it became restless and passionate with the force of a pent-up existence.

His small stock of pocket-money was jealously hoarded for drawing-paper, paints, and pencils; his spare minutes, sadly limited, were all devoted to their use. He copied again and again, with unwearied patience, every picture that he could find worth the pains; sketched again and again, at different seasons and in different lights, the same views around his home; he made also many original efforts, but he was never satisfied with anything that he did. He saw with almost too keen an eye his faults of drawing and colouring: he had no such eye for their virtues. Something of hope he did indeed feel, when he found his progress, such as it was, unquestionable. But his discouragements far exceeded his comforts. How could he do anything great without a teacher? Had such a case ever been? Had not every famous artist studied his art with some great master of his age? What hope was there for him, working in the dark, without a master, without even a friend?

Meanwhile, to the outer world, he appeared a strange, silent, dreamy boy—moody and irritable at times—and sadly discontented, his grandmother thought. His grandmother, an old lady of "the old school," who prided herself upon her common sense, had resolutely set her face against any such "nonsense" as that desired by Gerald. Drawing pictures was fairly well, she opined, as an innocent recreation; but to make it more than recreation was, if not positive sin, a sign of despicable frivolity. This old lady had no conception of any world beyond that apparent to her senses. But for her religious faith, her nature would have seemed, to all intents and purposes, devoid of spiritual element. As it was, that faith, in its way exceedingly devout, increased her firmness in opposing what she regarded as a waste of time and talents. Nevertheless, Gerald for years allowed himself to hope that in time she would yield to his wishes; that her eyes would be opened when she found that nothing quenched the flame which burned within him. In short, he cherished a secret fancy that, when he left school, she would allow him to go to London—perhaps even to Rome—and study according to his wishes.

He was penniless; this poor boy, like his sister, was entirely dependent upon the grandmother, Mrs. Wilton. He was a little delicate also in health, had grown too quickly; and his active brain absorbed much life and strength which would otherwise nourish his body. Her aid and consent were necessary to him; he could not go anywhere without them, and would not, if he could. For Gerald's moral faculties were at least as keen as those of his intellect; his conscientiousness in the matter of filial duty was almost morbidly extreme. His grandmother had clothed, fed, educated him; he owed to her a debt of lifelong gratitude. Her conduct, as regarded the desire of his heart, seemed to him little short of cruelty; yet, with feverish self-command, he restrained any undutiful word or feeling. Thus his boyhood went by; and at eighteen came a time to which he had long looked forward as decisive.

Despite his inward difficulties, he had risen to the head of the old-established grammar-school near his home. His masters were high in praise of his steadiness and application; all that he needed, they said, was a greater love of study for its own sake. This

report confirmed his grandmother's opinion that the idle life of a painter would be his ruin. He must now leave school; she could not afford, had she thought it desirable, to send him to the university: she resolved that he should at once begin the laudable task of earning his own bread. Her life was yearly more uncertain; her income would die with her; she told Gerald, with the intent to rouse his pride, that it was time he ceased to depend on her scanty means. She wished, however, still to keep him under her own eye; and at this juncture a situation fell vacant in a private bank in the town. For that situation Mrs. Wilton, without Gerald's knowledge, applied in his behalf; and succeeded. The salary was a mere pittance, the work laborious: but this, she believed, was just the training that he required. To sober him, to bring down his unfounded aspirations, and convert him into a practical man of business: such was her aim.

The boy had gathered all his forces for one final appeal; from which he had hoped more than he was aware of. He opened his heart to his grandmother as he had never done before; he promised, if she would help him forward in his desired path, that she

should never repent it; that in a little while he would repay all she had ever spent on him —he should call nothing his own until that debt was discharged. She should hear of him soon as a great painter—he felt the power within him! He could not work, he could not breathe, he said, shut up in a bank: it would crush out all that made his life worth the having.

"For 'Could not,' Gerald, say 'Would not,'" Mrs. Wilton rejoined: "Duty is always possible."

Then, when he argued that his duty was not necessarily represented by the calling of a bank-clerk, she informed him that the die was cast, that she had arranged all preliminaries, and that his work was to commence on the following Monday.

Now at length burst from Gerald a passion of fury and despair which caused Mrs. Wilton, highly displeased, to order him away. Out of the room, and the house, he rushed, as if possessed by a fiend; and was absent for many hours. Late at night, just as the old lady had begun to feel a little anxious, he came back; and coldly, as if going through a form, begged her pardon: then walked upstairs in the dark to his bed, without another word.

The subject was not again mentioned between them. When Monday came, Gerald went in silence to his desk at the bank.

But anyone who possessed penetration—a quality denied to Mrs. Wilton—might have seen that the iron had entered into his soul. His face had acquired a rigidity, his manner a distant coldness, as of one who desires sympathy as little as he expects it. In truth it seemed to him that his mind and heart were actually turned into iron—into a cold and heavy weight which he had to bear with him wherever he went. Heaven and earth alike, he thought, were bent on opposing him in his struggle after the only thing he cared for—cared for with such intensity of craving! He wondered, with dull pain beneath the wonder, why that craving should be implanted within him, so that he could not, if he would, put it away! An endless why seemed re-echoing through the world.

But youth was strong in him; the buoyancy of his years fought for him, and won the battle. After a time hope revived, courage rose up afresh; he resolved that he would despair no longer. A dogged patience took the place of bitterness: a determination to endure, to toil, to wait. Day after day he

plodded through the appointed hours: but when evening came — in summer, out of doors—in the winter, in his room, wrapped in his great-coat, lighted by a tallow candle,— he returned to the work that he loved; drew, painted, carved, struggling towards that fleeting ideal, so fair yet so capricious, which lured him ever onward.

Thus four years rolled away in a monotonous round. Gerald was now twenty-two— a man, and, in formation of character, far older than his age. Those forty-eight months of resolute labour at an uncongenial occupation, had borne their fruit of self-mastery, of fortitude, of dauntless will. The visions which came to him now were higher, more glorious, than in the days of impatient expectation. He had learned that there is something grander than the fulfilment of an artistic mission; something better than a gratified desire, however pure.

Meanwhile, the infirmities of age were increasing upon Mrs. Wilton; she had failed perceptibly of late, had grown feeble and peevish; and when, shortly after Gerald's twenty-second birthday, the bank, in which he was steadily rising, stopped payment, the sudden blow was too heavy for her strength.

She lamented, full of gloomy prophecies, for a day; and then was struck down by paralysis.

But the active habits of a long life were not easily banished. At the end of a week, she rose and came downstairs, altered in speech and in countenance, but able to move slowly to and fro about her usual occupations. Gerald was at home, forcibly idle, and, had his grandmother been well, he would certainly have repeated his appeal of four years ago. But now the grasshopper was a burden to her; every small household *contre-temps* worried her as if double its importance; the subject of the bank was seldom absent from her thoughts or from her lips; she began to fret about her own expenses, and to declare that she, too, was in the road to ruin. Gerald, she said, must help her; she had done enough for him,—and, if he had any atom of a dutiful spirit, he would now make due return. He must obtain another situation immediately—he must advertise, inquire; in fact, what must he not?

This was no time to urge his own claims. He began at once, as she desired, to "look out;" but who does not know what such "looking out" is, in this our over-stocked

England? Every clerkship of every kind was already occupied in the county town; and the failure of the bank had thrown many others into the same position as himself. Mrs. Wilton declared that she would give up her house, and accompany him elsewhere. She had been exacting and tyrannical to this boy; yet she loved him, as much as it was in her nature to love any one; and of late had grown to lean upon him, with a closer dependence than she knew. Gerald answered many and various advertisements; but it was by other means that help came at last.

It came, unexpectedly enough, through Marjory's friend Lina. The Peeles had now for several months been settled at Alton; and when a superior clerkship promised to be vacant in an old-established bank of that city, Lina, informed by Marjory of the state of affairs, found means to secure influential interest in behalf of an application from Gerald. A few weeks later the affair was settled; Gerald was appointed to the clerkship, far better than that which he had lost; and Lina now again offered her services to find either a house or suitable lodgings for Mrs. Wilton.

In anticipation of the move, the old lady's

strength appeared to revive. She declared, with evident pleasure in the thought, that there was no time to be lost, and for a day or two worked, with feverish haste, at all manner of miscellaneous preparations. But on the third day she sat peacefully down in her arm-chair, and said that she was tired, and must rest. The morning lengthened into afternoon, the early dinner-hour came and passed, and still the restless old woman, yesterday so full of occupations, slept on—awakened once or twice by Gerald, but only to repeat drowsily, that she was tired, and would sleep a little longer. At length it became impossible to rouse her at all; the doctor was summoned, and it was found that she had had a second stroke.

Twenty-four hours later she had slept herself away, not even awaking for so much as a last farewell.

The greater part of her income, being the pension of a naval captain's widow, together with a trifling life-annuity, ceased at her death. A small capital, equivalent to about fifty pounds per annum, was all that remained; and this she was found to have settled unreservedly upon Marjory.

"I beg my grandson Gerald to believe,"

said the will, "that by this settlement I do him no injustice, but rather promote his true happiness in casting him solely upon independent exertion."

She had known well in what manner Gerald would have employed that small capital, if placed at his disposal. Left penniless, he would, at least for a few years, be compelled to work at something useful; and gradually, it might be hoped, he would forget the dream of a foolish youth. The better to ensure this object, she had added a codicil, forbidding Marjory to give or lend any portion of the sum, or its yearly interest, to Gerald, or any other in his behalf, on penalty of instant forfeiture: in which case the legacy was to be transferred to an Asylum for the Orphans of British Seamen.

Marjory was full of indignation when this news arrived—conveyed in a letter from her uncle, who had gone to attend Mrs. Wilton's funeral. He was to bring Gerald back with him to Rockswold. For the first time since early childhood,—Gerald would see his sister, —that blue-eyed ,white-robed baby whom he remembered kissing in its nurse's arms when he was taken from his home, after their father had been laid in their mother's grave.

He had kept all that baby's letters, from the very first, in large round hand between double lines, to the last, of caligraphy just emerged from schoolgirl angles, expatiating on the joyous prospect of their meeting. His own letters in return, though regular, had been short: there had been in them all the difference between a boy's letters and those of a girl. But Marjory's ardent faith in him had supplied the deficiency, and had kept her happy and devoted, through all imperfections of response. Only now, when they were actually to meet, she became aware that she knew far less of him than he must know of her. His notes had only supplied some slight fabric for her imagination to work upon. She had been disappointed in Lina; she trembled a little now, as she waited, counting the days and hours, in the little vicarage.

She trembled, and repressed her trembling by constant occupation: reading to Aunt Lucy, and consoling her for Uncle John's short absence, practising her music, especially such as she expected Gerald to admire, tending sick people whom her uncle had left to her charge, teaching in the school—above all, preparing with eagerness a little room;

collecting pictures, and books, and trifling ornaments, to make it pretty and attractive; day by day visiting it and adding something to it—something for Gerald: until the fourth of her uncle's absence dawned. Then no occupation had power to still the fluttering of mingled joy and fear, hope and anxiety, in Marjory's breast; for on this day Gerald was expected.

CHAPTER XVII.

——" through life's fret and turmoil,
The passion and fire of art
In him was soothed and quickened
By her true sister heart.

* * * *

Her heart, her life, her future,
Her genius, only meant
Another thing to give him,
And be therewith content."

Adelaide A. Procter.

Fair hair—a little wavy, like Marjory's own—shading a square brow, with temples slightly hollowed; a fair but sunburnt skin; straight eyebrows, many shades darker than the hair; gray eyes, of a strange, melancholy beauty, so clear that they seemed transparent, showing the soul behind them; a straight nose, somewhat delicately defined; a sensitive mouth, changing with every expression, yet not without firmness, the lips more often slightly parted than closed, but in no degree loose or heavy; a square chin, clearly cut; a figure close upon six feet in height, broadly

built, yet somewhat thin, with an air at times as though it were an effort not to stoop; thin, brown, nervous hands, with a strange look of sentient life in them, constantly moving, as from a restless sense of power:—altogether, a person whom one would turn to look after, passing him in the street, whose face would haunt one with a vague impression like that produced by bells—a touch of melancholy, mingled with a magical sweetness, a glimpse of something indefinable, not wholly of this world. This was Gerald: as Marjory saw him on that summer evening when they met, it might be said, for the first time.

This was Gerald. This time her dreams were not disappointed. Here was something beyond dreams, something which she had never found before in any human being. She thought that it would be an object worthy of life or death to minister to that imprisoned power which shone with deathless fire in Gerald's eyes; to help in freeing that power, that it might do its work—its glorious, its divine work. All the dormant enthusiasm in her nature burst into a flame, as she sat thinking thus, and gazing at her brother.

The travellers had arrived in the June

twilight, just as one silver star had begun to sparkle in the calm succeeding to the sunset. Rest and food were their first necessities; but when the long meal in the little dining-room was over, Marjory watched her opportunity, and, slipping her arm into Gerald's, said in an eager whisper:

"Gerald, come with me—out of doors. They won't miss us; they delight in being alone together; and it is such a lovely night!"

A moment later they were out in the summer air. The sky above was cloudless, of a deep, dark blue; the moon nearly at its full had risen, clear and calm. The grass of the old-fashioned garden stretched before them, in patches of light and shade—shade cast by ancient apple-trees and pear-trees standing in close proximity to the flower-beds, dark and motionless like watchers. From those flower-beds a mingling of odours—lavender, wallflowers, carnations—floated into the silence. The landscape, all in shadow, sloped away beyond the mossy wall; here and there a cottage-roof rose black from sleeping fields: there was no sound, no stir of any kind.

"Gerald," said Marjory, "I wish you

would paint a picture of a night like this, and call it 'Waiting.' Just such a night, only later on, so that one morning streak might show behind distant hills, as a glimpse of promise."

As she spoke, she drew him on, through a low wicket, to the churchyard: where a quiet path, shaded midway by a great yew-tree, divided the graves. The deep black plot beneath the sombre branches cast into stronger relief the cold light streaming from the moon upon the grassy mounds, and sharply defining the outline of the tombstones. Here and there, so clear a gleam kindled an inscription, that it became almost as legible as by day. A rustic bench encircled the ancient trunk; here the brother and sister sat down.

"You must give up all notion of my ever painting anything worth speaking of," said Gerald, suddenly: "I am doing my best to give it up myself."

"Gerald, what do you mean?" cried the girl, her blue eyes wide in consternation.

"I mean that I have been a fool to dream of it so long. I might have seen, years ago, that all the circumstances of my life were against it."

"But, Gerald, is it not the glory of the greatest men to be great in spite of circumstances?" cried ardent Marjory. "And now, especially, when there is no one to oppose you! You are your own master now. Why not throw up the Alton appointment, go straight to London, and study at the Academy? You will soon make your way. I will go with you, if you will have me. I can live on my fifty pounds, can't I? and I will help you in every way. You shall have no hindrances—not one."

"Only, unfortunately, I shall need a little bread and cheese, and house-room too, I fear; and how should I get them if I were doing nothing but study at the Academy?"

"Oh, dear! what dreadful power money has! and I cannot give you any of mine! But, Gerald, listen! Go to Alton for a year, or longer if necessary, and live as sparingly as you can; and, when you have saved enough to keep you for a year in London lodgings, give up Alton, and go *there*. At the end of that year you will be able to make more than enough—by pictures, or by taking pupils, or both—to give yourself up entirely to art. And you will rise, Gerald. Have

you forgotten all your ambitions? Oh, no; I can see them in your face! You talked so only to tease me."

"No, Marjory; I did not. Three or four days ago I had this very plan in my mind. I was full of hope, happier than I have been for years. I thought that it was now only a question of months, of economy. I calculated on how much—I mean how little—I could contrive to live. I fancied it had been a good thing, after all, that I had had to wait; that my pictures might be all the bettér. Yes; I was up in the seventh heaven for a little while! I thought I must be terribly hard-hearted to feel so, when my poor grandmother was only just dead; but I could not help it. And then, all of a sudden, I found this letter."

He put an open envelope into Marjory's lap, and sat still, looking out over the graves. Marjory stepped beyond the shadow of the yew, that the moonlight might fall upon the letter. It was written in a quavering hand, yet one which had once been bold and firm; every word was clearly legible.

"Dear Gerald,—

"Many years ago your grandfather, my

late husband, contracted a heavy debt, of which the interest only, during his lifetime, was paid. At his death this circumstance came, for the first time, to my knowledge. I at once began to pay off the principal in annual instalments, which, chiefly owing to the expenses of your support and education, were not so large as I could wish; and yet, together with the interest, made a heavy drain on my income. I hoped, however, that I might live to see the debt entirely cleared; and this may still be the case. But, since my health is now precarious, I think it best to write this letter, which I shall leave in my desk. Two hundred pounds of the debt remains to be paid. This house, as you know, I hire furnished; my own possessions are few and worthless—you could not raise anything on them. I have written to my husband's excellent friends, Messrs. Grove & Carter, solicitors, and I have told them that, in the event of my death, you will continue to pay the instalments, together with the interest, until the obligation ceases. This the Alton clerkship will enable you, with proper economy, to do. You may think it unfair that I should leave such a burden on your shoulders; but consider, Gerald, how

much I have spent upon you—not in money only, but in care and thought. Moreover, to this arrangement I look to guard you from the foolish career which you had marked out for yourself, and into which you would otherwise, at my death, doubtless plunge. I have too much confidence in your sense of honour to feel any fear that, with this obligation upon you, you would wantonly throw up the certain subsistence through which alone you can fulfil it. You will see the wisdom, and, indeed, the duty, of remaining in some steady business until every farthing of the two hundred pounds is paid. By that time you will be no longer a boy; and it is my hope that advancing years will bring you a higher aim than to fritter away your life as an idle painter. God bless you, my dear Gerald!

"I remain,

"Your affectionate grandmother,

"DEBORAH WILTON."

"And I cannot help you? I cannot pay the debt from my legacy?" cried Marjory, still standing in the path, while the moonlight streamed on the relentless letter.

"You forfeit it all if you attempt to pay

one farthing either of debt or interest. There is a second codicil to that effect."

Marjory returned to her seat in silence. A sudden blank had fallen upon her eager young face.

"It will be seven years, so far as I see, or five at least, before I can get clear," said Gerald. "I have signed an agreement with Grove & Carter; they were very kind; there will be no undue pressure. But think, Marjory! I am twenty-two already. I tell you, I hate my work—I loathe it—and yet I have been grinding at it now for more than four years! By the end of seven years more I shall be fit for nothing else. There's no remedy, you see. I have no friends able to help me; I have no money. The only possibility of my paying this debt is to keep on at the same old tread-mill. Why, I am not even certain that I have any real stuff in me as to art; it may be all smoke, for aught I know! There have always been plenty of fools in the world who imagined themselves geniuses. My best plan would be to uproot those fancies. I need not give up ambition altogether; I might some day rise to be the manager of a bank," said the young fellow, bitterly.

"You never can uproot those fancies, Gerald; they are part of you; they are not fancies," cried Marjory. "I will find a way to help you; just wait a little; let me think."

She raised her hand as she spoke, and Gerald was silent, waiting patiently, and, despite his sadness, with some amusement, while Marjory plunged into reverie. He watched those earnest blue eyes of hers fire in some inward absorption, and felt a sudden glow of pleasure as he realised that here was a spirit cast in the same mould as his own; truly, in a double sense, a kindred spirit, in intercourse with whom he experienced the new enjoyment of fellowship. He should never have been so utterly wretched, he thought, had she been with him always.

"I have thought!" she cried suddenly, her eyes shining and her cheeks burning: "I have had a plan all my life, and now it will be better than I fancied. I will get the money to pay off your debt!"

"But how can you get money?" asked Gerald, watching her curiously.

"By writing. Ever since I was a child my dream has been to write books, and get money by them, for you, to help you to be

an artist. I did not know then, exactly, how money could help; but now it is plain enough! I have such a story in my head! I have begun it more than once; only I have never yet been able to satisfy myself;—but now the bare idea of freeing you from this burden seems to set me all on fire. I can do it, Gerald! I feel it—I am sure. And perhaps very soon. You will see."

"But I shall not like to take your money, Marjory," said Gerald, smiling at her ardour.

"You could not be so unkind as to refuse? You would have to bend your pride! Yes, you mustn't be unhappy any more, or even think of giving up your hopes. It will be only a little more waiting; and then you will be free. I will work so hard, Gerald! and now I have something more to propose to you."

"Wait one moment," said Gerald: "I don't want to damp you; but it is very hard, Marjory, to make a beginning in authorship. I have heard and read a great deal of the difficulties. Unless you can get an introduction, or have really a great talent——"

"Yes, I know: I know it is hard; but I mustn't think of that, and you mustn't talk of it, for fear I should be discouraged. I

can but do my best; and I feel a confidence, stronger than I could tell you, that I shall succeed. Don't think me conceited; it isn't that: but I—I shall pray every day that God may help me; and I feel quite sure He will."

An involuntary gleam of sunshine broke out on Gerald's face; her simple faith in her mission was confirmed.

"My life will be devoted to you, Gerald," she said: "I shall never marry, but remain free to work for you. There is such power in work! If we do our utmost, we are certain to be helped and bless'd."

"You are very good, Marjory," said Gerald, humbly.

"No, I am not; I am only hopeful. But now I must tell you of my other plan;—we shall have to go in directly. Gerald, I want to go with you to Alton."

"I should be only too glad to have you," said Gerald: "But where is the money to come from?"

"Money, money, money! you have money on the brain!" cried Marjory, laughing like a child: "Have I not fifty pounds a year of my own? and will not that keep me in food and clothes? It shall, I tell you."

"But your lodging——"

"I was coming to that. Before poor grandmamma died, Lina Peele told me of some tempting rooms, close to the cathedral, belonging to a real lady, who also keeps a school——"

"A young ladies' school?" said Gerald, making a queer face.

"A preparatory school for little boys. She is a clergyman's widow, with one sister; and they have more room than they want. Their last lodgers were a poor curate and his daughter; the daughter helped in the school, and so got her lodging free. Now I have been thinking that Mrs. Myers—that is the lady—might take me on the same terms."

"But how would you bear the drudgery of teaching?"

"It would be no drudgery to me! I delight in little boys; and Lina says that the curate's daughter gave only three hours—from nine to twelve. For the rest of the day I should be my own mistress, and have plenty of time to write."

"And all for me! No, Marjory, I ought not to accept it; it is too much!" cried Gerald, starting up. Marjory followed him, clinging to his arm.

"Nonsense, Gerald, don't be tiresome!

It would be nothing but pleasure. And I could write better in a town. I love the country more than I can express; but I want to see more of life—human life—at least for a time. Lately I have felt such a restless longing to get among my fellow-creatures, to know something of the stir of the world. Perhaps presently I shall want to come back; but I would like to go for a little while. And I shall be with you; we shall explore life together!"

"How jolly it would be!" exclaimed Gerald, his youth asserting itself at last: "Only what will my uncle say?"

"Oh, I'm sure he will consent. When grandmamma died, both he and Aunt Lucy seemed so sorry that you must go alone to Alton, and said it was so bad for a young man to live in lodgings alone. Then I shall no longer be an expense to them; they often find it hard to make both ends meet. Of course, I should in any case now pay for my board; but Uncle John would not like it."

"I'm afraid they will miss you very much," said Gerald, looking at her bright face with brotherly pride.

"A little, at first, perhaps; but I shall tell them that they must send for me when-

ever they want me. And I have always spent a great deal of time apart from them; they are so perfectly wrapped up in one another. I have helped in the schools and cottages; but I am not really wanted in this small parish. I shall feel quite conscience-clear in going to be with you."

"Then we'll write to this Mrs. Myers to-morrow," said Gerald. It was as though a cloud had passed from his brow, his voice, his manner. And Marjory observing him thought:

"My mission has begun. I shall succeed! yes, I know that I shall succeed."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Dreams of the future allured me,
Such dreams as young hearts only know,
When the skies are all sunshine and glory,
And this earth seems a heaven below."

Musical Bouquet.

It was towards six o'clock on a broiling afternoon in early August, that Marjory's eager blue eyes looked from the windows of a second-class railway-carriage, and saw, wide-spreading on either side, the roofs and spires of Alton, the cathedral tower rising like a beacon in their midst. Beneath the cathedral flowed the river, winding on through a fair expanse of fruitful meadows and orchards. Marjory had forgotten how much beauty lay close around the old city; she looked at it now with new eyes, a child no longer, striving, unsuccessfully as yet, to trace her childish memories. The train steamed slowly into the large and busy station. An excursion train had entered just before; the platforms were crowded; there were loud voices, scuffling, and pushing.

The country maiden felt bewildered, and even a little alarmed; it was a relief to see Gerald's now familiar face looking from the throng.

"Gerald, Gerald, here I am! my luggage is in that van," she cried, holding fast to his arm: "Oh, I am so glad to be here! but I hope my luggage is safe."

"Come along, and we'll see for it; I have a friend among the porters," said Gerald, piloting her through the crowd. He had been at Alton upwards of a month, and Marjory had performed the long journey alone, under the guard's supervision. "There's a cab all ready outside," said Gerald, when the luggage was ascertained to be safe: "I am very glad too, Marjory! I'm tired already of living alone. It will all be different now."

"It will be perfectly delightful," cried Marjory: "Is this the cab? I hope no one will steal my boxes. What numbers of people!"

"Almost the amount of the Rockswold population!" said Gerald, laughing: "What would you say to London, I wonder! and, for the matter of that, what should I?"

"Oh, this is quite enough, to begin! London would be altogether too much. Now we are off. Gerald, surely he is driving too fast! Shan't we be upset?"

Gerald laughed again, soon joined by Marjory. Both were full of spirits. Gerald indeed could not remember a time when he had been so happy, so hopeful.

"You are Whittington, and I am your cat," said Marjory: "We are setting forth on our adventures. I am quite brimful of excitement, Gerald! I don't believe I can ever feel quiet again. When shall we get out of these back-streets?"

"Before long. There are fine old bits, though, in some of these streets; such quaint houses! I have lighted upon three or four in the very worst places, black and white, with splendid old oak carving, and overhanging upper stories."

"And there is an old church! The stone is almost black with age; and has it not a glorious stained window? Gerald, we must go on exploring expeditions. I seem to be suddenly let loose into 'the wide, wide world.'"

"It is a wider world than Rockswold, at all events! This part is called The Cross;

I suppose the old town cross was here. And this is High Street. Now we shall soon be at home."

"I see some charming shops, Gerald; I must not go too often into the town! Oh, the cathedral!"

They had turned a corner, and suddenly the stir was gone. Here was an old-world place, with quiet houses overlooking a railed-in oblong of smooth turf, and, between turf and houses, a road leading to the north door of the cathedral.

What is there in the aspect of an ancient cathedral which lifts one instantaneously into another atmosphere than that of work-a-day life, with its common talk and traffic? One looks up at the grand heights, at the massive walls; and the present is gone like a dissolving view; centuries long dead arise in hoary greatness. The spiritual world—how near, how vivid, it appears, as one stands gazing thus! Those altitudes are material; yet they bring the ethereal very nigh. The unseen universe which surrounds us, often forgotten in the hurry of the scene,—here, beside that embodied dream of glorious old masters, its presence is not believed in merely, but felt. It is as though that dream had

been an inspiration, leaving behind it the power of inspiration for ever.

"The mere fact of living always within sight of this, should make one great," thought Marjory, as she stepped from the carriage. The whole north side of the cathedral stood, many-windowed, before her, the pinnacled and richly decorated tower rising midway. The north door, deep within a fine perpendicular porch, was partly open, giving a glimpse of the nave. An old verger, in a long black gown, stood in the portal, inhaling a breath of outer air; a meditative canon was walking leisurely along the raised pavement to his home. The rooks were cawing to one another from carved nooks where for generations they had sheltered; the calm sky stretched above, the fretted pinnacles defined in clear outline against the blue.

Marjory stood still, and breathed the spirit of the place: while Gerald rang at one of the row of houses.

"Mrs. Myers has two houses," he said. "Ours is No. 14; she and Miss Pilkington live at No. 13 with the boys. There is a door of communication inside."

"Will you please to walk in, miss?" said

a good-tempered voice, with a high-roofed twang which carried Marjory back to Branksome and Mrs. Hammond. A rosy little maid, with a snowy apron, stood smiling in the doorway. Marjory smiled in return, and entered the house, while Gerald saw to the luggage. The little maid led the way up one flight of shallow stairs, lighted by a large window, gay with geraniums in china pots. At the top of this flight, three doors opened upon a small landing.

"These are yours, if you please, miss. Mrs. Myers' compliments, and she will be in directly."

"What a dear little room!" cried happy Marjory, as the maid opened one of the doors. It was the sitting-room, with two low windows looking out upon the road—the College Yard, as this side of the cathedral precincts was designated. The room was clean, and fresh, and bright to the last degree, simply furnished, but with refinement, betokening the hostess; and now it looked at its best, the round table spread with a snowy cloth, a vase of roses in the middle, and tea ready laid—with radishes, and watercress, and golden butter, and pretty china brightening the effect. A cottage piano was

among the furniture; a little writing-table stood in one window, a flower-stand in the other; Gerald's books and pictures were strewn about, and made the place homelike; and at home Marjory felt herself forthwith.

"Now may I see the bedrooms?" she said; and the little maid opened the other doors. Her room and Gerald's were close together, furnished alike, and with the same western aspect. The spotless cleanliness of the parlour was even more striking here. Beds and toilet-tables seemed bleached to the utmost possibility of purity; the crockery, white with a pink rim, shone in quite a dazzling manner. But Marjory ran straight to the open window, facing her bed. Immediately below, a strip of garden, with a grass-plat and one ancient apple-tree, was bounded by an old wall of russet brown; and beyond this wall flowed the wide river, mighty yet peaceful, green meadows on its opposite bank, and cows feeding there, as in rustic Rockswold. A range of hills—the Shelburn Hills, as Marjory remembered—bounded the horizon. Sometimes those hills were well-nigh effaced by mist or rain, sometimes startling in their clearness; now they were bathed in a soft haze of mingled light and shadow.

Thus far, Marjory might have imagined herself still in the country; but plenty on either side remained to remind her of the contrary. Some way to the right, the river was spanned by a massive stone bridge of three arches—a boat-house hard by, where Marjory saw a crowd of boats awaiting customers. Beyond this bridge, the houses clustered thickly on either bank; here and there a spire, or the chimney of a factory, rose above the roofs. In the distance the Grand Stand was visible, close to the river,—the race-course extending beyond the range of Marjory's vision. All this on the right: on the left, an old house, a canonical residence, seemed to spring out of the water; the deanery gardens stretched away in a line with the window, a line continued by other buildings connected with the chapter, all more or less gray and venerable; among them, immeasurably grander than the rest, rose the western front of the cathedral itself. Past all flowed the broad river,—the murmur of the town mingling with its ripple, and telling of the corresponding flow of human life, no less unceasing.

Marjory could have lingered in that window for hours; but a tap at the door recalled her

to herself. Looking round, she saw a small elderly lady, with drab hair, partly hidden by a blonde cap, a drab dress, and drab boots. Indeed, she had much the appearance of a drab mouse, enlarged to the minimum of female humanity. As Marjory turned, she performed a low bend, between a bow and an antediluvian courtesy, and then held out her hand.

"Miss Stanhope, I presume. I am Mrs. Myers. My sister, Miss Pilkington, hopes to wait upon you later. I trust I see you well?"

Marjory thanked her, praising the rooms.

"I am gratified to hear that they please you. Cleanliness at least we can rely upon; soap and soda are not costly articles."

"And yet worth their weight in gold!" cried Marjory. "I am so much obliged to you for letting me come in this way. I do hope that my teaching will satisfy you; if not, you must send me back."

"There will be little fear," said Mrs. Myers, graciously, "your duties will be very simple. The first thing will be to make yourself at home; our charges do not return for another week."

"I thought I saw two little boys looking out of a window."

"Those were my own sons, Benjamin and Ambrose. My sister, Miss Pilkington, is the master-mind of the establishment. I am the nominal mistress; but she is my right hand. The understanding is that I superintend the wardrobes and domestic matters; and she the outdoor exercise and castigation. Judicious punishment is a strong point with her. Not that she is at all hard, Miss Stanhope!"

"I suppose the little boys are very naughty sometimes," said Marjory, smiling.

"Exceedingly so," said Mrs. Myers, "and only, in her opinion, to be repressed by chastisement of a practical kind."

"Now, Mrs. Myers, you know how often I have told you to send for me when that is to be administered," said Gerald, coming upstairs: "I am quite willing to take the office of whipper-in-chief, if you will permit it."

Mrs. Myers laughed below her breath in a mumbling manner, and observed:

"You must not think that we have any pleasure in chastisement, Miss Stanhope. I merely mentioned the subject in anticipation of Miss Pilkington's doing so, being anxious lest you should deem her severe. We do all

in our power to make the little boys happy; indeed, I only hope that their noise will not annoy you. They would quite get the better of me," said the mouse; "But Miss Pilkington is a master-mind. Are you ready for the urn?"

Marjory thankfully replied in the affirmative; and Mrs. Myers, with another bend, retired, pausing to look back and say—her hands falling lightly over each other, exactly as the forepaws of a mouse might fall, were it placed on its hind legs: "We reside in the adjoining house; but the kitchens and the servants are in this one; so you will be properly attended, I hope. At any time that you wish to speak to me or Miss Pilkington, this door is entirely at your disposal."

So saying, she denoted a door in the wall, opening in a somewhat breakneck fashion upon the staircase: and by its means disappeared.

"There is another door downstairs in the kitchen," said Gerald, "through which the No. 13 meals are carried, and the servants go in and out. The bell-wires communicate, and Priscilla, the little maid, runs backwards and forwards. It was Miss Pilkington's arrangement. You know she is a master-mind."

"It is a very good arrangement," said Marjory, laughing; "You and I will be delightfully private! I should not at all like to live in the next room to that awful Miss Pilkington."

"Miss Pilkington is not awful—not a bit of it; she's only a good joke," said Gerald, with his quiet smile. "By-the-by, I have found no less than nineteen caricatures of her, all, unless I am mistaken, the performance of one hand. Most of them have 'Sweet Sally,' or 'Lovely Sally,' scribbled underneath; and one, 'The Sally Pill, cure for all ill.' I have got them, every one."

"Where did you find them?"

"She invited me to look round the schoolrooms, and examine the books and maps; and there I came upon them. The artist may think himself lucky that it was I, and not she!"

"Shall you show them to him, when he comes back?"

"Ay, and frighten him well, the little beggar. I shouldn't have thought twice about them, only they have a dash of talent, which struck me. He is aware of it himself, perhaps; for he has had the audacity to sign his name on several—'Lewis Harding!'

I wonder if he is related to Harding, the famous painter."

"Couldn't you ask Mrs. Myers?"

"I did—not saying why, of course, only that I had come across the name. But she could tell me nothing except that he was the pickle of the school. There was one very mild portrait of herself, inscribed 'Our Ally.'"

"Her name is Alice; I remember the signature," said Marjory, laughing: "Oh, I am so glad that this is a boys', instead of a girls' school!"

"I am not, at all. I might have got some good studies out of girls,—models for my angels."

"I dare say! You wouldn't have been allowed to go near them. In that case, Mrs. Myers wouldn't have taken us. Oh, Gerald! there comes the urn, and I am not ready. I must just wash my hands."

"I'll make the tea,—I'm used to it. Don't hurry," said Gerald. But Marjory was too much excited not to hurry. In three minutes she was again with Gerald, turning over his books, while the tea was brewing; and talking all the while.

"The best of lodging with a real lady,

Gerald, is, that one will never be stinted in water. Such a delightful quantity in my room, and a great bath !—and you have one too, I saw. I remember what a triumph of resolution cleanliness was in Mrs. Hammond's lodgings."

"When the lower orders learn to appreciate water, we shall have made a great step in civilisation," said Gerald, philosophically: "One hears of free libraries. I wish free baths could be established in every town !"

"Yes, it seems such a pity," said Marjory, quite mournfully, "that so many millions should never know the delight of plunging into fresh water, and coming out clean."

"By-the-by, Marjory, I went to Branksome the other day, and tried to hunt out Mrs. Hammond's house. I found one at last which answered to your description; but that is all I can say, for names and numbers are altered, and the whole quarter has spread a mile into what was country in your time."

"Nevertheless, I could find the house directly," cried Marjory, with eagerness.

"Well, you shall see if I was right. I took the bold step of knocking at the door; but nothing was known of the Hammonds. I

asked elsewhere, but with the same result. The name seems to have vanished."

Marjory looked a little blank.

"That is tiresome," she said; "I hoped that Mrs. Hammond might have told me about Thorne. Her mother kept one of the lodges there; and she knew Bellhouse, and all of them."

"Well, we will have another hunt. I did not take so much pains as I might. Perhaps they have only emigrated to another part of the town."

"I shall enjoy the search," cried Marjory, in a glow again. "I am looking forward, more than I can say, to exploring all the old places. Have you—I am almost afraid to ask—but have you heard anything of Thorne?"

Her heart quickened its beating, as she listened for his answer. She felt as though she could not bear to face the transformation which eight years of "the changes and chances of this mortal life" might have brought upon that fairy land of her memory.

But Gerald had heard nothing.

"I asked Mrs. Myers about it, one day," he said; "But she has only lived at Alton two years, and has no country acquaintances; she did not even know the name. We'll

commit the extravagance of a cab, some day, and drive out there, after bank-hours. We can walk back, if you are able, in the cool of the evening."

"Able ! I should think so ! Oh, Gerald ! it will be like a dream come true. Only—I am half afraid."

After this, she stood silent for a while; looking out to where the cathedral, in its massive grandeur, seemed to say, "I at least am changeless." The rooks recalled those others in the rookery at Thorne; the sky rose in a blue vault, above tower and houses, just as Marjory had seen it long ago. She started a little when Gerald's voice brought back the present.

"I've inspected the tea, Marjory, and I think he'll do,—as the people about here say. Nothing is neuter here, everything has a masculine personality; and yet, I should think, there was never in any county a less imaginative race. But the washerwoman sent me this message on Saturday, anent a missing shirt: She 'oped I'd please to excuse him for a day or so, as he'd met with a accident, through er being bad, and obliged to leave him to er daughter."

"I remember the same in Mrs. Hammond.

It used to puzzle me painfully, in those days. —Where shall I sit, Gerald ?"

"Here, of course," said Gerald, placing a chair behind the urn; "You are the mistress, you know. How jolly it is!" he said, smiling, as he sat down at the opposite end. "When I think that you will be always here, it seems too good to be true; the next best thing to——"

He stopped suddenly.

"To what?" asked Marjory.

"To the pleasures of ham," said Gerald, carving very carefully. "I hope you will like this ham; It came from the country, through Mrs. Myers' butter-woman. Henceforth I turn our eating and drinking over to you, with the greatest relief."

"I hope I shall manage well: I mean to try very hard. I dare say Mrs. Myers will advise me, or Miss Pilkington's master-mind."

Her momentary curiosity had been diverted by the teapot—which she was nervously propitiating with a view to Gerald's second, or even third, cup of tea. She had no suspicion of the secret relief with which he saw his abrupt pause forgotten. How could he be so ungracious as to say to this young sister,

who had evidently no thought but for him, the words which had risen spontaneously to his lips—"The next best thing to a wife!" How could he betray to her that her devotion, so entire, so unselfish, stood only second in the light of that ideal devotion—as yet only an ideal to Gerald. He had never been "in love" with any being of flesh and blood; for he had never yet found any such to embody the dream of his artist nature. Moreover, he felt, with a galling sense of the yoke, that his poverty precluded such embodiment. Nevertheless, the dream lingered in that nature of his, hidden and wrapt up in it; and poverty could not at least obliterate his own private views of the highest earthly happiness. But private they had always remained, so far.

"By-the-by, Gerald, I forgot to ask—have you seen anything of the Peeles?"

"Nothing; except their house. They are all away at Dover, I believe, Mrs. Myers said."

"I knew that Lina was at Dover; she has a married sister there: but I fancied the others were at home."

"By-the-by," said Gerald, feeling in his pockets, "Here is a letter in your friend's hand, which came for you this morning."

"Only an Alton post-mark! Sh
be at home again," cried Marjory.—"
see! she has sent three tickets for a
harmonic concert in the music hall
morrow night,—one for you, one for m
and one for Mrs. Myers."

"She is at home, then?"

"No; she has left Dover, but she is
spending a week with some friends a few
miles from here, and they will drive in to
the concert. She will not be at home before
the end of the week, when Mrs. Peele will
join her. Gerald, do you know that I have
actually never been at a concert? What is
the Philharmonic Society?"

"A set of musical amateurs of this town
and county. They have a concert once a
quarter, and some professional swell comes
down from London to conduct. I believe
the society is considered unusually good for
the provinces, and the concerts are crowded.
I have heard a good deal about this one,
from our fellows at the bank."

"Gerald, is that a man coming upstairs?"

"It is Miss Pilkington," said Gerald,
rising, and opening the door, just as a de-
cided hand began—not a tap, but a genuine
knock, on its outer panels. Marjory rose

likewise, in some trepidation; and beheld a lady above middle height, with two fat curls of gray hair, confined by combs, on either temple, and eyes of a startling prominence. She bestowed on Gerald a passing nod: and marched, as with a purpose, towards Marjory.

"How do you do, Miss Stanhope?" said a contralto voice: "I am sorry that I was engaged when you arrived. I hope you find the rooms comfortable."

She nodded once or twice as she spoke, and stared from beneath a frowning upper brow.

"Thank you, I only hope you may be half as well satisfied with me and my teaching," said Marjory, nervously.

"We are not at all hard to satisfy," replied the lady, nodding again. "My system I will explain at your leisure. The difficulties I reserve in my own hands; Mrs. Myers takes the motherly part; and your share will be chiefly mechanical."

"I will do my best to fulfil it," said Marjory.

"I am sure you will," said Miss Pilkington. She paused an instant, silently surveying Marjory; then repeated, "I am sure you

will," with another frowning nod; and turned abruptly to Gerald.

"You look as if you wished to speak to me, Mr. Stanhope."

"What an awful thing it is to be in your presence, Miss Pilkington! Your penetration is superhuman. I was merely going to ask if you or Mrs. Myers would honour us with your company to-morrow evening. Miss Peele has sent three tickets for the concert?"

"Mrs. Myers will enjoy it, no doubt. I will tell her. As for myself, I do not appreciate music."

"And yet 'music hath charms to soothe the——' you know what, Miss Pilkington —which the little boys are of opinion that you possess."

"If I am savage, they would soon be savages, without a tight rein, Mr. Stanhope. I make it a point of duty, during school-hours, to imagine myself a man. Was it not one sage satirist, Thackeray, who was repeatedly saying, 'Discipline must be maintained?'"

"Miss Pilkington, you shock me! What would become of you if a Government inspector were sent down to examine you in light literature? Thackeray may have made

the statement in the course of his life; for that I will not answer. But the person who was repeatedly saying it, proceeded from the brain of Dickens."

"Indeed! You surprise me. But I have neither time nor taste for modern fiction. If you will produce the passage in Dickens's works, I will own myself mistaken. At all events, it is a maxim to which—under the impression, I know not why, that it came from Thackeray—I am deeply indebted. I have a heart, Mr. Stanhope, though some might doubt it; and the female heart, as we all know, is weak. It does not do to go by it on all occasions, Miss Stanhope, with respect to little boys. And for many years, when I have wished to silence its dictates, my habit has been to whisper inwardly, 'Discipline must be maintained.' I have found these words an unfailing guide."

"Meanwhile, won't you have a cup of tea, Miss Pilkington?" said Gerald.

"I? No, indeed. I must be off," she replied, at once in a violent hurry, and stumped away.

"She's not so very awful, after all, Gerald!"

"No; only an oddity, and a very kind one. Well, Marjory, now you have seen them

both, and you can form a fair idea of what your life here will be. They are always the same—and always pleasant and good-tempered; they will not interfere with us in any way. I don't see how we could be more comfortable if we were a duke and duchess."

"We should be far less comfortable in that case, because we should be less free! I feel all primed for work, Gerald, and longing to begin; and this happy opening seems a good omen. Oh, Gerald! if only the end is as happy as the beginning——"

She stopped suddenly. Why at this moment should a shadow cross her mind? The evening light was falling on Gerald's face; he looked more hopeful than she had ever seen him.

"Never mind the end," he said; "We can leave that for the present. At any rate, we have set forth with flying colours."

"Yes, indeed," cried Marjory, joyously, cheered by his smile. Her spirits flew quickly back to their previous exaltation.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Thou with strong prayer and very much entreating
willest be asked, and Thou shalt answer then,
Show the hid heart beneath creation beating,
smile with kind eyes, and be a man with men."
Frederic W. H. Myers.

When Marjory had unpacked the few things required for the night, she begged Gerald to take her out. She felt too restless to sit still; the heat of the day was past, and "the sun was approaching his going down;" the evening calm would soothe her excitement. Gerald was nothing loth, and she was quickly ready to start; but he asked her first to come upstairs for a moment, saying that he had something to show her.

"I thought we had no upstairs," said Marjory. "Are not all our rooms on this floor?"

"Miss Pilkington will not prosecute you for trespass, if that is what you fear; and I have something to show you," repeated Gerald.

So Marjory followed him to the landing on

which the servants' bedrooms opened, and thence, up another short flight, to an attic in the roof.

The low doorway could not be entered without a stoop; but, once inside, there was abundance of room—the roof rising high, and leaving on either side a wide slant, occupied by boxes and other lumber. Through a gabled window, looking westward, a flood of red light was streaming as Marjory entered. She saw the river far below, with that same light upon it, and, beyond, the Carlton Hills in golden haze. But the chief attraction for her eyes was an impromptu easel, which Gerald had erected by means of a wooden box-lid raised upon a packing-case, and kept in its proper position by a pile of old books. On this rough easel, covered by an oblong canvas, the outlines of a picture had been sketched.

It was the picture of a massive bridge like that of Alton; but the waters beneath it were more turbid than those of the Alton river, dashing against the arches in troubled waves. They were wider also: one bank was close at hand and clear, but the other, with the end of the bridge, loomed dimly through clouds of mist. Towards that misty shore a long

procession of figures was passing. Some were old and stooping; some young and strong; some walked in groups, some singly. One or two had paused to lean over the parapet, and watch the tide below. The faces were imperfectly filled in, as yet; but the touch of a master had been there, making the vague lines eloquent. The moon was figured in the sky, half hidden by clouds, casting strange gleams on the dark waters. At the foot of the canvas were scribbled Longfellow's lines:

> "I thought how many thousands
> Of care-encumbered men,
> Each bearing his burden of sorrow,
> Had cross'd the bridge since then.
>
> "I saw the long procession
> Still passing to and fro,
> The young hearts hot and restless,
> The old subdued and slow."

"Are they crossing to the other world?" said Marjory.

"You can take it whichever way you like. Either to the other world, or some uncertain future in this. I have only a half-fledged idea of their destination, myself: what chiefly filled my fancy was the thought of the procession, passing on and on, like the feet in

Dickens's 'Two Cities.' I seemed to hear those feet," said Gerald, dreamily, "all the while, as I sketched out the figures."

"You have begun this since you came here?"

"Yes: I thought of it first a fortnight ago, as I was standing on the bridge down yonder. This is only the rough idea, as you see; the faces will take a long time. I see a fresh one whenever I go into the town."

"And this, Gerald? this will be beautiful!" cried Marjory, bringing to the light a picture of considerable size, which had been turned with its face to the wall. Here a young sculptor was just awaking from a sleep into which it seemed that he had fallen from sheer discouragement of spirit. So at least his attitude and surroundings implied. He sat in a humble room, upon a rush-bottomed chair, his arms folded on a rough deal table; near him stood a half-finished statue, and, on the floor beside it, a chisel, as if thrown from him in discontent. But the workman was awaking, his head slightly raised from his arms—a new light dawning in his eyes, ready, so it seemed, to disperse the cloud which still shadowed the lower part of the thin and careworn face. For he was looking,

as in answer to a call, to a distant corner of the poor room, where a winged figure hovered in mid-air, in a surrounding flood of glory. One hand of that figure pointed to the unfinished statue, and the chisel lying idle on the floor; the other held on high a laurel-wreath. The head was turned towards the sculptor; the bright hair shone, but the face was blank—the incomplete portion of the picture.

Marjory, her eyes full of intense appeciation, looked inquiringly at Gerald; but his own were fixed upon the picture, in anxious abstraction: the sculptor's trouble seemed reflected in himself.

"It is of no use," he said, after a long silence: "I cannot catch it! Marjory, turn it back."

"What do you mean, Gerald?"

"Turn the picture back, as it was before; the sight of it vexes me. I have vague fancies for that spirit's face, but they will not come clearly. I cannot get the look I want. Sometimes I think I have it, but directly I try to put it on paper it fades. For a whole year I have been striving after it."

Marjory turned the picture back without another word. Her sympathy was too in-

tense for speech. She understood the subject: the spirit form was the Ideal made manifest. What wonder that a fitting shrine for such manifestation should be difficult to find? She and Gerald both stood silent for a while, looking towards the window.

"How did you find out this room?" she asked suddenly.

"Miss Pilkington offered me the use of it: partly, I think, from dread of damage—she had seen my paints lying about—and partly from real kindness. It is only a lumber-room, as you perceive; and yet a far better workshop for me than the proper little parlour downstairs."

"It is so quiet," said Marjory. "And so high! one feels raised above the world. May I come here whenever I like, Gerald?"

"I should not have thought you would imagine that necessary to ask," said Gerald, smiling.

"And I may look at those?" asked Marjory, pointing to a large box, minus a lid: which was piled to overflowing with drawings—coloured and uncoloured—sketches, copies, original fancies, accumulated through Gerald's years of waiting.

"Oh, yes, look at what you choose; only

don't talk of them afterwards! I am disgusted with two-thirds of them; and the rest will never come to anything. I hardly know why I brought them here; but egotism is deep in human nature. I hadn't resolution to burn them."

"I should hope not! you don't know what pleasure it will be to me to shut myself up with them to-morrow!"

Gerald slightly shrugged his shoulders, without reply; and turned towards the door.

"We had better go out now," he said; and, Marjory casting behind a lingering glance, they returned downstairs. The neat little maid was crossing the small entrance-hall, and paused, with a smiling curtsey, to open the outer door. As they stepped out upon the pavement, the cathedral once again impressing Marjory with its solemn grandeur, a peal of bells broke forth from some church in the town.

"Those are St. Crispin's bells," said Gerald,—"that very old church which you saw, as we drove from the station. They often ring in the evening."

There could be no doubt that the peal was old! Such bells are not often moulded in

these days, for churches of small account. Rich, mellow, sweet, with a strange, unutterable melancholy, they gave their own tone to Marjory's musings, as she looked out on the surroundings of her new home.

Eight bells: each a distinct voice of the past. Marjory fancied that she could see the Alton people of the times when those bells were young, walking to and fro in the streets, in their quaint costumes—to them, the latest fashion; that she could hear them talking in the strange language of those old English days, discussing public matters, so much as they knew of them, wars, marriages, and royal doings—matters of history now, and no longer of general interest, for they happened hundreds of years ago. Thence her fancy travelled to the flat stones, black with age, that paved the aisles of the old churches, covering those quaintly-clad forms which then were so busy. Beneath those stones lay some hearts worn with aching, and others which had scarcely known what aching meant, throbbing high with hope and joy as the bells rang out. Both alike were forgotten now; and still the same bells were ringing. Had they only been conscious beings, how philosophical, ere now, must they have grown!

"We will have one look into the cathedral," said Gerald; "You must see it thoroughly another day."

The low north door was still ajar; they entered, and stood within the nave. Speechless with awe, Marjory gazed into the vastness, into the heights of the groined roof, the intricacies of moulding and carving; found face after face, of angel, apostle, saint, look down to meet her upturned eyes. Pure and calm as the stone which formed them, as she gazed they seemed to multiply; and, one after another, to glance afresh from unexpected places.

"We want to lock up, sir, if you please," said the black-robed verger.

"The doors are always open in the day, Marjory; you will be able to come in whenever you like," said Gerald, as she lingered.

"I shall come for inspiration in my writing—my writing which is to be for you," whispered Marjory. Then they went out, the old verger following, and locking the door.

"Now," said Gerald, "you must turn yourself over to me; I shall take you where I choose to-night. After this, you can explore for yourself, or with your friend, Miss Peele."

"I hope you and Lina will get on well together, Gerald. I have often talked to her about you."

"I shan't see much of her," said Gerald; "I must spend my spare time in work, or in study for it, to be prepared in case your plan should succeed."

"Don't say 'in case!' It will succeed. I don't mind telling *you* why I feel so sure: because you will understand, and not call it cant. I am praying night and day for success: and that is why, Gerald."

"But prayer for temporal things is not always answered," said Gerald, wistfully.

"I have been thinking a great deal about that, and I will tell you what I have thought. I want you to follow me, step by step. You believe that Jesus Christ did live on earth, Gerald — and in His Divinity, and His Word?"

Gerald bowed his head.

"Of course, if one do not believe in those foundations, the whole case is altered. But you and I have no doubt that He did really say: '*If ye shall ask anything in My Name*, I WILL DO IT.'"

"But——" said Gerald.

"Wait one minute! St. John says:

'If we ask anything ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, He heareth us.' That limits the matter, and shows, I suppose, why many temporal prayers are not answered. But it is my belief that many and many more might and would be answered, if people had more faith. You know we are told again that we must 'believe,' and 'not doubt in our heart' that the prayer will be granted. At least we should have no doubt but that it must be granted, 'if it be according to His Will!' You agree to that, Gerald?"

"I suppose so."

"But you mustn't only suppose it; you must believe it, and feel sure of it—only with that limitation. And now, about this particular prayer of mine: I do feel quite sure, and I do mean to feel quite sure, that it must be granted. Because it must be according to God's Will, Gerald, that the power which He gave you should be made use of. He did give it to you; for it was born in you: it is not a fancy, an imitation, but a real power. Gerald, it *must* be His Will that it should be used, not buried."

"I suppose so," repeated Gerald: "It seems probable. I don't know that I ever

put the fact to myself in that decided way, before."

"Well, but, if you think it well over, you will see that it is a fact. Could any one believe that our Maker would design and create, and place in an immortal soul, such an artistic talent and such a craving to give it vent, for nothing, Gerald? Surely there must be a purpose in it, for Him and for the world. That seems to me self-evident, and therefore I say that it must be according to His Will to remove the hindrances which have kept that talent pent up, without outlet, and to set it free for its work. This is why I feel confident, even certain—I say it reverently, Gerald—that my prayer for you to be an artist—which God created you —will be granted."

She spoke with ardour which could not fail to impress. There was a strength and brightness in her face, as of some young radiant spirit sent from the city of the gods to cheer the souls of men, and breathe into them life from his own sunlit nature, to lighten the toils of earth.

"But, Marjory, to confess the truth, I have often, on the other hand, thought it was not God's Will that I should be an artist.

Circumstances have been so against it all my life; my desires have always pulled one way, and my necessities another."

"Yes, but circumstances are not always a mark of Providence. Because it is often through conflict with circumstances that lives are made grand. Just think of all the heroes who had difficulties, and even failures, at first! Now—to go on—you know that I have been scribbling all my life, more or less; and I have taken such pains, Gerald, and done my utmost, to learn the art of writing. A short time ago, when I sent a little story to a magazine, the editor, though he declined it, wrote that he was struck by the evidences of power in thought and style, and that, with practice, I might hope to become a successful author. Those were his very words, Gerald!"

"Well done, Marjory! Ah, I dare say the highest renown I shall ever achieve will be as the brother of the celebrated Miss Stanhope!"

"Oh, you unkind boy! when you know that all I care for in the matter is to help you. I should write in any case, from the love of it; indeed, it was that which first put this idea into my mind But, only for you,

I should never dream of trying to publish: I would far rather leave that alone, only it will be such joy to help you, Gerald!"

"Thank you, Marjory; I cannot help catching a little of your hopefulness," said Gerald, with his dreamy smile.

"And don't you see," went on Marjory, fast and eagerly, as though words were not rapid enough for the thoughts which flowed into her brain—"don't you see it is not as if I had prayed for a power not given to me by nature? That would be presumption. But since I can write a little, and feel that I have it in me to write more, surely there is no presumption in believing that I am meant by this means to help you! I do believe it—I do, Gerald," cried the girl, her whole face glowing. "And, believing this, I believe also the promise that my prayer will be heard."

"Oh, if it should!" said Gerald.

Their eyes met. Marjory was struck, silenced by the expression in his. It was that of one who sees within sudden reach a prise which his very soul has yearned to gain, but has long given up in despair. With all her sympathy, Marjory had hardly realised the intensity of that yearning, until

this moment when she saw it in those gray, transparent eyes, through the flash of hope revived.

"Oh, if it should!" She laid up those words in her heart.

In her absorption, she had hardly noticed that, during this conversation, they had been slowly walking away from the college-yard, and round to the west end of the cathedral. Below that western end she now awoke to find herself standing, behind a line of iron rails, overlooking the river with the meadows beyond, and the range of Shelburn hills. The house which Marjory had observed from her window, standing out over the water, was close below: an old canonical residence of time-worn brick, blackened by age. Under the wall at its rear, a few steps led downwards to a gateway, beneath which Gerald and Marjory passed into the enclosure known as the College Green.

They were still under the shadow of the cathedral, but now on its southern side; between this and the green arose the ancient walls of the college school, from whose Foundation scholars the staff of choristers was mainly supplied. The green consisted of a large quadrangle of grass, fenced in by

iron palings, and shaded by magnificent elm-trees, planted at intervals along the boundary walk of smoothly-rolled gravel. Beneath these trees a few ladies, of the *élite* who possessed private keys of admittance, were enjoying the evening air, and watching a party of children engaged in croquet at one end of the velvet-like turf.

The children's laughter rang pleasantly across the quadrangle, wakening cheerful echoes from the gray buildings around, as if to show that life and youth were still active, even here. These were the young generation, who some day might learn to smile with superior wisdom at the old institutions among which they had been nurtured,—perhaps some of them to vote for total abolition of the cathedral system. At present, little dreaming of any such future, they sent the painted balls flying over the ground which ancient monks had paced in hallowed meditation; and Marjory through the palings watched them with a fellow-feeling of enjoyment, her young mind beneficially lightened of its strain. Beyond the quadrangle lay a gravelled space, bounded by venerable houses, which were occupied, almost without exception, by members of the cathedral or

scholastic staff, or relicts of the same. Here a canon's residence; next door, that of the head master, with his large family of children and boarders; then a narrow slip of a house, rented by a minor canon, then the quiet home of a former bishop's elderly daughters, then the late archdeacon's widow; and so forth.

In this still corner the great world was banished, and a little world formed in its stead; with its own ways, its own society, its own forms and topics of speech. A dignified, orderly little world, respectable to a degree, and critical of all that differed from it in opinion or in manners; mixing only, beyond its own circle, with members of "the county"—ignoring the upper classes of "the town," as a sphere beneath its notice. Excellent people, nevertheless, within their own boundaries were its denizens—kind and amiable, despite their narrowness, and doing much quiet good according to their lights. Doubtless there will be many to miss them if, as our children grow, and the scope of their ideas widens, such small societies are swept away altogether in time's "ever-rolling stream!"

The way by which Gerald and Marjory had

entered these secluded precincts, was accessible only to pedestrians; but at the other end of the quadrangle was a massive gateway, known as Chad's Tower, surmounted by a turret, the habitation of an ancient porter, whose duty it was to close the great gates at ten o'clock each night, and open them at six each morning. They were open now, revealing a paved passage beyond—whither, when Marjory's eager eyes were satisfied, Gerald conducted her. Once through this passage, just wide enough for two carriages, and under a gray old archway, some hundred yards on, they were again at the entrance of the College Yard, having made a complete round.

CHAPTER XX.

"I dwell amid the city ever,
The great humanity which beats
Its life along the stony streets,
Like a strong and unsunned river
In a self-made course,
I sit and hearken while it rolls."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

"Now you have seen the oligarchic end of Alton," said Gerald, smiling; "If you are not tired, we'll go on and have a look at the people."

"I am not at all tired, and it would be a shame to go in yet. How delightful the evening air is, after so much heat! and the sky has such soft tints in it. And I do so enjoy the bells."

"Yes, they seem to put a poetry into everything. I wonder what it is in them that influences one so? I want to take you to Heathcroft, Marjory,—the ground lying about the race-course. It is open to the public; and on these warm evenings all Alton seems to be turned out there. We can

go by the river-side, if you like, and come back through the town."

So they passed their own house again, and went down by steps to the towing-path. Broad and calm beneath them flowed the river in the evening light, with a gentle splash as it swept along the stonework that hemmed it in. Gerald and Marjory walked in silence for some way, under the line of garden-walls, which ended presently, succeeded by warehouses, offices, and workshops, soon dispelling the old-world hush of the cathedral atmosphere. Below the bridge, they seemed to have entered another state of being. Here was an old barge, gaily painted, moored close to a little wharf, with all manner of boats, from a river schooner to outriggers, congregated round it. A party of young people were just embarking for an hour's row. Unsophisticated Marjory stopped at some distance to watch the process :—two girls and two young men took each an oar, —another girl steered. They were all very merry, if not very refined, and pushed off amid chaffing and laughter. Marjory looked and listened with intense interest; while Gerard smiled, amused at her freshness.

The commonest matters were all new to

her; she observed everything, enjoyed everything. Every person whom she met was an object of individual interest; and, as they proceeded on their way towards the race-course, her attention was increasingly occupied. Many more boats met or passed them,—some, like the first, freighted with merry parties, some manned by youths in costume, practising for an approaching regatta; sometimes an outrigger, long and narrow, shot past, sculled by a single oarsman; and now, for the first time, Marjory beheld a canoe,—a wondrous experience!

Pedestrians also multiplied. Presently the lines of building, only varied by occasional entries to narrow streets or courts, where dirty children were playing, and dirty women gossiping at closely crowded doors, came to an end; and a small gate opened upon the series of fields known by the name of Heathcroft. These fields filled an extensive space between the town and the river. Here the grand stand rose, ugly and conspicuous; here also was a cricket-ground; here the annual regatta, and athletic sports, took place. And here, on these summer evenings, the Alton citizens came to breathe the fresh air from the river. Numbers were

pacing leisurely to and fro, some in family parties—father and mother, and children running before; some in couples of love or friendship, some solitary, but all at ease, all seemingly happy and refreshed. The whole was a pleasant sight, thought Marjory, as she and Gerald mingled with the rest. Many were chatting with friends on the river,—numerous boats paddling backwards and forwards near the shore, within reach of the sweets of society. At a little distance boys and young men were playing at cricket; the tap of the bat upon the ball resounded through the still air. The grass was very dry, and various groups were seated upon it, some of them with books or work. The opposite bank was lined with villa-like houses, and gardens sloping to the river; lower down were trees, and meadows stretching away into the country. The sun was setting peacefully in crimson glory; the music of the bells came softened, from the old church in the town.

"You might make a good picture out of this: 'Heathcroft, Alton, in the summer-time,'" observed Marjory.

"Yes, and there are single studies without end; every variety of face and character, if

one watches from a little distance. The cathedral people do not know what they lose by their exclusiveness. If they would come here sometimes, or to places like it, they might learn a thing or two more than they guess, about human nature."

"Human nature is not their study, I suppose," said Marjory; "or they are content with what they see of it among themselves. I can understand that one might grow to feel very comfortable, shut up in a refined circle of one's own."

"But then it would be one's own—not the great world," said Gerald, in his dreamy way: "'It takes all sorts to make a world,' you know. It's better to live in a world, in spite of all the passion and coarseness and wear and tear, than in a nutshell."

They had been resting upon the pleasant grass; now rising, Gerald suggested that they should return home through Albion Square. The river was soon left behind, and Heathcroft traversed in the direction of the town. Passing the militia drilling-ground, and other enclosures, they entered by a turnstile, upon a flat path, which ran parallel, for half a mile, or more, with Heathcroft. Here for some minutes they paused, beside

the low white paling, to look back at the scene which they had left. It was gay and pretty, the numerous figures dotted in all directions over the green, the river flowing below, cows and horses grazing in adjacent meadows, and the peaceful bank opposite, richly clothed with trees, bathed in the amber of the sunset.

"There is a great deal of happiness in this world; it is not right to call it a vale of tears," said Marjory, as they turned away.

Gerald made no answer; he only smiled a little, as he walked silently by her side. Marjory fancied that beneath the smile she heard a half-smothered sigh. In another second, however, he looked up, and went on pointing out names and places. They had quitted the path, and were threading a labyrinth of new houses, some gaily stuccoed, in gardens, neat shrubs before the doors—others small and bare, recalling the old feelings of Branksome. Presently a turn in the road brought them into a more pretentious quarter, where the houses were all alike stuccoed, and differed only in size, varying from a respectable family block to an elegant slip, tall and narrow. Looking about her, Marjory found that they were ranged in the form of a

square, bounding an enclosure of considerable size, with a croquet-ground, seats and paths.

"Now I will show you your friend's house," said Gerald.

They paced slowly round the square, a pleasant place, and "truly genteel" in its appointments! every house and every garden neat even to primness, and the central enclosure surrounded on the outer side by acacia-trees, chestnuts, and limes, casting upon the road a comfortable shade, in which birds made sweet music. Presently Gerald paused before a one-storied house, its garden gay with standard roses, and a great urn, full of crimson geraniums, on either side the door.

"This is Mrs. Peele's," he said.

The blinds were all drawn, and the shutters closed. Nevertheless, Marjory paused for several minutes, and gazed with a curious fascination. What would she not have given once, she thought, to see Lina's home—the home of her ideal? It would then have seemed to her a sacred place, with a peculiar, an ineffable charm. Now it was just a house—No. 25, Albion Square. She was sorry that the halo had so completely faded. She was not yet sure if it were not by some fault of her own.

"What are you thinking about, Marjory?" asked Gerald.

"Nothing of any consequence," said Marjory, blushing. That experience concerning Lina was buried as yet in the recesses of her girlish heart; she had spoken of it to no one.

They walked on, talking of other things, until the circuit of the square was accomplished.

"Now, Marjory, if you are really not too tired, and would like to have one look at Branksome——"

"I am only a little tired, and I could not pass so near without just seeing it," cried Marjory.

They went on, and, turning another corner, found themselves once more in the town, in the old street called The Friars, a name which Marjory well remembered. Before them rose an ancient hospital for decayed men and women, with a little chapel where, morning and evening, a cracked bell ting-tanged for prayers. This also Marjory remembered; and now it was she who led the way, turning out of The Friars, between two iron posts, at the head of a long, narrow lane, which led below the hospital-walls into the

region of Branksome. In a little while they had plunged into the thick of the red brick. There it all was, as of old; only the colours were somewhat softened and less staring, after the eight years of sun and rain; the shrubs were not quite so stunted; and there were trees which had been saplings in those past times. But the little shops, the Baptist chapel, the academies, the uninteresting doors and pebble walks, were all exactly the same; and Marjory felt like a little child again among them. It was as though she were coming home from her walk in the summer's evening, to go to bed in the fusty little room, overlooking roofs and chimney-pots, at Mrs. Hammond's. The fancy quite oppressed her, until she looked at Gerald, and satisfied herself that these eight years had not been a long dream.

Ere long, behold the clock-faced church! but here was a change indeed. The doors stood open; Marjory looked in, saw stained windows, a "dim religious light," low open seats of polished maple, a super-altar, with candles and flowers, choir-stalls, a new organ. The girl from quiet Rockswold had never before seen such a church: the transformation seemed a work of magic.

"That gable-ended place beyond, which used to be the school, is now a Sisterhood and Orphanage," said Gerald: "And this is the Clergy House," he added, indicating a building of the prevailing red brick, which Marjory remembered as containing two semi-detached abodes. Now it was one house—small enough still, but distinguished by a painted window. A clergyman in a cassock was crossing the little garden.

"How strange it all is!" was Marjory's only remark. She stood still for a little while, then went on in silence.

"Now, here is the house which I thought must have been Mrs. Hammond's; but I had little beyond guesswork to go upon."

"Your guesswork was quite correct, though. Yes, that is Mrs. Hammond's: there is the window of our little parlour, and Aunt Lucy's bedroom above. How natural it all looks! Oh, how it all comes back to me!" cried Marjory, standing at the iron gate, and looking up the path.

Could it really be eight years since the day she had come down that path, so hot and tired, a little child going in search of the country?—since that other day when Lady Thorne's sleek horses had drawn up here in

the road, and she had gone back along the same path—a strange aching in her heart as she thought that her happy visit was over? Eight years ago! And she had never throughout them heard a word of Thorne! Was it unchanged, like this little lodging-house, or metamorphosed like the clock-faced church?

"Gerald, I must go in—I must ask about Mrs. Hammond."

"Well, I did my best, as I told you; but you can try again if you like. I'll wait for you here."

So Marjory went once more through the familiar little garden, and knocked at the well-known door. It seemed strange not to turn the handle and walk in.

A stout woman, in a black print dress studded with white spots like peppermint drops, answered the knock. She was evidently the mistress of the house.

"Can you tell me anything about a Mrs. Hammond who once lived here?" asked Marjory.

"No. Been asked before. Never knew no such a party."

"Then who had this house before you?"

"The parties before us were folks in the name of Dawkins; and Harris's was here

afore them. That was five year ago and more. Yes," said the stout person, counting on her fingers: "We have been here three years an' a half, ourselves."

"Gerald," said Marjory, as she rejoined him, "How soon can we go to Thorne?"

"As to that, I suppose we could go the day after the concert."

"The day after to-morrow. Oh, Gerald, if you could give up that one more evening! I have such a longing to find out about them all! Even Mrs. Hammond gone, and swallowed up in the years!—— I could have heard something from her."

"Well, we'll go then; and you shall find out all you can," said Gerald, kindly. Marjory earnestly thanked him, as they turned on their homeward way.

Through the heart of the town they went; all down the Friars and the Cross and High Street; the shops for the most part closed, the sunset radiance replaced by dusk, but the streets bright with gas, and still lively with numerous pedestrians returning from Heathcroft, or places more countrified, to which the summer evening had tempted them. And the bells were still ringing: their sweet strong voices echoing from the world

long gone by. Marjory, now thoroughly tired, was glad to re-enter the quiet college-yard; still more glad when, an hour later, she lay down in her white little bed, her blind drawn up, and a silvery star gleaming on her from above the peaceful river.

CHAPTER XXI.

"O World! O Life! O Time!
* * * *
When will return the glory of your prime?
* * * *
Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight."—*Shelley.*

The music-hall, brilliantly lighted, was filling rapidly when Mrs. Myers, Gerald, and Marjory entered it on the evening of the concert. The stewards, distinguished by satin rosettes, were active in escorting the holders of reserved tickets to their seats; and Marjory presently found herself comfortably ensconced about half-way down the middle phalanx of chairs, in a position equally excellent for seeing and for hearing. This latter fact was but a natural inference from the circumstance that the tickets had been chosen by Lina—Lina, who was always right, and knew the correct thing in every department of social science. Marjory, as she took her place, wondered again at that fading of the halo!

But this was not a time for metaphysical

musings ; the world without was all new and wonderful, and demanded entire attention. How the people came thronging in ! Marjory gazed, entranced, at the pretty girls, the family parties, the friends who entered together. She admired the fashionable dresses, the flowers, the coronas of starlike lights, the panelled pictures of Saint Cecilia, of Handel, of Dr. Burney. A provincial concert, passably arranged, to Lady Fairlegh in the front row;—a confused blaze of fascination to Marjory !

Meanwhile, Mrs. Myers, in a blonde headdress and a dove-coloured silk which had seen better days, sat in mouselike propriety at her left hand. On her right sat Gerald, looking dreamily at all around him, but absorbed in visions of his own the while—far more real to him than these outer objects. Marjory, between them, formed a picture of radiant youth and freshness, at which many turned to glance—her blue eyes were so bright, her hair was so sunny, her whole countenance so illuminated by eager interest.

As to her dress, Aunt Lucy, with infinite pains, had ascertained from a London correspondent all proprieties ; in accordance with which, within the bounds of strict economy,

Marjory's Alton outfit had been chosen. And economy, with taste and contrivance, had proved itself surprisingly elastic! At Rockswold Marjory had feared that her new dresses were too grand for every-day wear; but her twenty-seven hours at Alton had already dispelled this impression, making her instead thankful for Aunt Lucy's happy thought of writing to the London friend. Thus to-night she was prettily and fashionably attired; and the simplicity of the materials seemed only in accordance with her youth. Gerald noted with pride and pleasure the admiring glances cast, from time to time, in her direction; but Marjory herself, after her old childish fashion, was far too full of her surroundings to think of herself.

Meanwhile, sounds of tuning had begun in the raised semicircle; the performers were coming to their places. Her eyes seemed larger and bluer as she gazed into the intricacies of the orchestra; at the variety of instruments, and the confusing throng of black-coated and white-robed vocalists,—who were whispering and laughing among themselves, and looking at the audience, as the audience were looking at them. Presently the London conductor assumed his wand; and silence followed.

Then the performance was opened by a grand overture, in which all the instruments joined.

Marjory's observations were in no degree hindered by her enjoyment of the music, which seemed indeed to add a romantic charm to groups and faces otherwise dull and uninteresting. A spell of enchantment on her ears, her eyes wandered among her neighbours; she invented stories concerning them, as she had been wont to do about the young ladies of Miss Somerville's school; new scenes, and even characters for her book, flashed suddenly upon her fancy, as she gazed from row to row of the various faces and families, which had been living each its own life, for years and years, while she, unaware of them, lived hers. The fulness and the diversity of the world of human beings seemed to strike her as a new thought; she realised it with an intensity impossible in quiet Rockswold. Her eyes shone with a strange excitement; she felt herself in a region, not of music alone, but also of poetry—the music and poetry of humanity, manifest to her now as never before.

So popular were these concerts, that almost every place in the large hall was filled; but one chair, the last of a side row, somewhat

in advance of the middle row where Marjory and her party sat, had hitherto remained vacant. She had observed it with regret, as a blank spot among the throng, and then, looking elsewhere, had missed the moment when it became occupied. Suddenly, glancing once more in its direction, she saw that it was empty no longer. A young man was seated there—a man whose dark hair was cut and brushed in a manner which, together with the carriage of the straight shoulders below, suggested the idea of a soldier. Marjory looked at him a little curiously, fancying that his figure was somehow familiar to her. His figure was all that she could see; his back was towards her; he was looking straight before him, with folded arms. For a second or two she watched him; then, her attention being otherwise attracted, she thought no more at present of the new-comer.

The overture had been followed by a chorus; and now came a vocal trio; one of the three names was "Miss Peele." Marjory glanced from programme to orchestra; there stood Lina, calm and beautiful, in a white robe, of soft flowing tulle, one spray of starlike jessamine in her hair. She looked the more lovely in contrast to her companions,—a stout

matron in blue silk, with a profusion of flaxen curls, and a prim little clergyman. The matron sang soprano, the clergyman bass; and Lina, between them, took the second part.

The song was an old madrigal, with words of no particular meaning, all about shepherds and leas and purling streams; but Marjory had an instinct that such serene subjects were more suitable to Lina than ary of passion or of power. She had a mezzo-contralto voice, with a plentiful range of high notes, but richer and fuller in the low ones; her singing was strictly in accordance with its excellent training; her manner, too, was perfect, entirely composed, no flutter, no shyness, no awkwardness. A couple of years ago, it would have seemed to Marjory that an angel stood there in those white robes, white stars about its head. Some indefinable instinct prompted a glance towards the soldierly young man in the side row; but his attitude was unchanged. Still looking straight before him, with folded arms, his head erect—if he admired, he showed no outward sign thereof.

As Marjory's eyes returned to the orchestra, she heard a low voice in her ear.

"Who is that beautiful girl, Marjory? Give me the programme."

"That is Lina," cried Marjory, delighted at the impression produced by her friend.

"Miss Peele!"

"Why not?" said Marjory, laughing.

"I had no idea that she was so beautiful," said Gerald.

He leaned forward, as he spoke, his elbow on the back of the chair before him, his eyes fixed with strange intensity upon Lina. Marjory felt no surprise that his artistic instinct should be quick to recognise perfection so unquestionable. The trio over, she looked towards him, expecting some further remark; but he had relapsed into dreamy silence.

In the course of a bright glee which followed the trio, Marjory glanced again towards the side rows. The person who there attracted her had turned slightly in his chair, so as to face the centre of the orchestra. His arms were folded as before; one foot was crossed upon the opposite knee, with an easy coolness of attitude, which recalled to Marjory——What? She had now a fuller view of him; he might be eight or nine-and-twenty, scarcely handsome, yet narrowly escaping it, and with the unmistakable air of high breeding; an air which he carried with

a careless grace that seemed a second nature.

His profile was partly visible. Marjory was struck by its expression—unhappy, bitter, proud, with a touch of defiance,—a little cynical, a little weary, as if the world had served him ill, and he were sick of it. The impression that she had seen him before, deepened upon Marjory. Again and again, as by a secret fascination, she found her eyes returning to that chair; but, for some time, she told herself that she must be mistaken, that it was only a strong likeness which attracted her.

But now began a piece to which Marjory had all the while looked forward: an assortment of Scotch airs, woven together with exquisite taste and feeling, the treatment of which, for amateur musicians, was of unusual excellence. The old airs went straight to Marjory's heart; as in the days when she was a little girl in the drawing-room at Thorne, watching Mrs. Vivian's shapely fingers, as they drew magic from the strings of her harp. "John Anderson, my Jo, John," melted into "Auld Lang Syne,"—one of the identical airs to which the child on that summer-evening had listened. She

saw the whole scene again: the little old lady, with her grave serenity,—the stately harpiste, cold and proud—the young soldier, with his kind, bright face, on which as yet no shadow of care had fallen. Then, involuntarily, she turned once more to that bitter, unhappy countenance in the side-row. She could see it no longer; he had changed his position again, and was leaning forward, his brow shaded by his hand. Thus shaded it remained, till those Scotch airs were over. Then suddenly he rose, and left the room. He went so quickly that Marjory did not see his face; he passed her in a moment, and was gone.

Shortly afterwards, the first part terminated; people began to get up, to stretch their limbs, and chat. Marjory's attention was absorbed in wonder as to whether that man in the side-row would come back; and in watching his empty chair. She longed to get a full view of him; her mind was busy with speculations. She did not observe that Gerald had risen, looking earnestly towards the platform; until presently, stooping towards her, he said:

"Marjory, Miss Peele has left the orchestra. I can take you to speak to her, if you like."

"Oh no, thank you—do not trouble," replied Marjory gratefully; "I'd rather wait till the concert is over."

Gerald said no more.

The ten minutes' grace was quickly past; the audience resumed their places; voices were hushed; the conductor resumed his wand. At this instant the owner of the vacant chair came up the side-row, close to Marjory. One or two people were before him; he paused; and, in pausing, happened to glance in Marjory's direction. Her eyes met his; she knew him; he was Mr. Hugh.

Suspicion was certainty now. There could be no mistaking those dark, bright eyes, when fully visible—however changed their expression. They were the same eyes; it was the same face, though bereft of the old sunshine. The blood rushed in a flame to her cheeks; her heart beat rapidly; she had a confused sense that the music had begun, that Mrs. Myers whispered "How fine!" but she heard all as hearing not. For the moment she could think only of that face, so strangely, so sadly altered. What had happened in these silent years to alter it so?

He had gone back to his place; he was sitting as before. He had not recognised

her, of course—how could she expect it? She had been a little child when they parted; and now she was almost a woman. But the change in him was not of natural growth. That peculiar air of lightness and brightness, that reckless gaiety, which had characterized the young soldier—what had chilled and quenched them? As Marjory gazed, the transformation grew upon her. This man with the hard, bitter face—he was like a dark shadow of the Mr. Hugh of old. He looked so restless, too—such deep dissatisfaction was mingled with the air of scorn. And withal there was something which went to Marjory's heart, and moved it as it could never have been moved by the careless gladness which she remembered. The stamp of a broken heart was upon that brow, once so sunny; the trace of pain—pain aching and wearing, which had eaten deep into the very life of that proud, glad young spirit. She felt as though she were gazing upon a wreck—a wreck cast nearer hell than Heaven.

And, gazing, the memories thickened in her mind: she saw the past as though rehearsed before her. She heard again the merry voice saying: "Don't found your

views of life on the sentiments of codgers . . . the world's a very jolly place . . . there's nothing too good to be true." She fancied how contemptuously would this dark countenance smile scorn upon such words uttered now by any youth like that youth of the past! Then came the recollection of Mrs. Vivian's devotion, of the petted boy who had "never known what it was to be crossed," whose maxim it had been "never to think of disagreeable things before the time." What terrible time had come to him since then? what storm, with death in its blast, had swept over him?

Was he married, and had Lady Rose Fairlegh been an unloving wife? Somehow he did not look as if he were married: but rather as if he had no home, as if no one belonged to him and he to no one—utterly lonely, a waif, and desolate.

Then awoke in Marjory's heart a passionate pity, akin to that which she had felt eight years before, when, on the night of the thunderstorm, she lay awake in Miss Evie's little bed, thinking of him—wondering how it was that he could be at once so kind and so wicked—and trembling, child though she were, about his future. The same pity,

intensified, took possession now of all her heart and mind; burning like an ardent flame in her enthusiastic and unegotistical nature. She longed to speak to him, to ask what blight had wrought so sad a change; she desired to penetrate to the root of that hard bitterness.

Yet withal she was conscious of a fear of him—a fear altogether new: he looked so cold and sarcastic, such a thorough man of the world, in its worst and hardest sense. His face, too, had a pride, a haughtiness, which she had seen in Mrs. Vivian's, but never before in his. But of the cause she could know nothing: at least for the present. She could only watch, wonder, think—until her heart felt ready to burst. She had not hitherto realised how closely the tendrils of her childish affections had twined themselves, not only around all at Thorne, but specially the young soldier who had been kind to her.

For several minutes she had looked away, though still absorbed, towards the orchestra. Some one was singing "You and I;" as from far away came to her the words—"*In the sweet summer-time, long ago.*" Her blue eyes, the eyes of her childhood, went back to that face of which those words

seemed to speak. Then she saw that he had turned, his arm upon the back of his chair; that he was looking full at her with a strange surprise. Meeting her glance, he looked away at once; but she fancied that she had caught a gleam of recognition. It might have been fancy only.

The last chorus was over, every one had risen to join in the National Anthem. People had already begun to go out, impatient to escape before the final crush. Among the rest, *he* went—alone as he had come. Marjory was conscious that he paused for one second, less than a second, and looked once more in her direction. An instinct which she had never previously experienced, withheld her from looking in return, and kept her eyes fixed upon the extensive shoulders of an elderly lady in a low dress, in the row before her. The ordeal was quickly over; he passed on; and now Marjory's head was slightly turned to glance after him: but he had already disappeared.

CHAPTER XXII.

"When I see her earnest eyes,
In them a heaven of beauty lies!
So pure are they 'that from their ray
Dark Vice would turn abashed away.'
I almost thought to-day to trace
A sort of young Madonna face."

John Jerningham's Journal.

The performers were bearing off their instruments; there was a hum of voices, a creaking of seats, as people pushed them aside to make a passage.

"Shall we wait till the crush is over?" said mouse-like Mrs. Myers.

Marjory assented, sitting down; but suddenly started up again.

"Lina! I had forgotten her! Mrs. Myers, will you excuse us one moment? Gerald, I must speak to Lina."

"This way," said Gerald eagerly, as she seized his arm.

"But is she not gone to the door?"

"No, she is there, under that window. She seems in no hurry; most likely she

is waiting for a carriage. Make haste," said Gerald, making his way through the crowd.

Marjory clung to his arm, and was presently on the opposite side of the hall. There, under a window, as he had told her, stood Lina, among a little knot of acquaintances. Marjory felt suddenly shy: the more so, since Gerald, having brought her to within a yard of her friend, stopped short, and remained in the background. But Lina had perceived her, and advanced, with her usual graceful dignity.

"Well, Marjory, here you are! Welcome to Alton! I hope you have enjoyed our concert?"

"Oh, yes. Thank you so much for the tickets. Lina, this is Gerald."

She looked eagerly round for her brother, the brother concerning whom so many hopes had so often been poured out to her friend. She had seen the impression produced by Lina upon him; now she watched anxiously the impression produced on Lina. It was favourable: this a glance revealed—not so much by any decided expression in Lina's face to that effect, as by the absence of expression to the contrary. Marjory was well

acquainted with the rigidity, the stiff coldness, which, on occasion, Lina's classical features could assume. But she had never looked more gracious than in acknowledging Gerald's bow.

"How do you do, Mr. Stanhope?" she said, extending her hand: "I have heard so much about you, that it does not seem right we should meet as strangers."

Marjory, well pleased, glanced at her brother. He was flushing to the roots of his fair hair; those deep transparent eyes of his were fixed upon Lina. Some sudden light transformed his whole countenance. He smiled a little, but said nothing: his whole being seemed absorbed in that gaze.

His evident admiration, respectful as evident, seemed by no means displeasing to Lina. Her graciousness increased as she expressed to Marjory her hope of calling in the College Yard immediately upon her return.

"We go home on Friday, and, if Saturday be fine, I shall hope to come then, with mamma!"

"You shall see Gerald's drawings," whispered Marjory.

Lina inclined her head with a smile. She

thought Marjory, as usual, "gushing," but received the gush amiably, as, in this instance, a pleasing proof of sisterly pride. A summons from the party in the background closed the interview,—Lina being conducted on an elderly gentleman's arm to the carriage, and Gerald escorting Marjory back among empty seats to Mrs. Myers, and thence to the cloak-room, where they had left what wraps were needed in the warm summer night.

Afterwards, through the gas-lit streets, they walked home to the quiet college yard.

"I have seen Mr. Hugh, Gerald!" were Marjory's first words, when she and her brother were alone.

"You are certain? He must be altered."

"Quite certain. The same face and the same eyes—but yes, he is altered! The brightness is exchanged for bitterness."

"I suppose the world has gone hard with him in some way. It *is* a hard world, you know."

At but a year or two behind Gerald's present age, that young soldier of the past had said something very different about the world! Marjory recalled his words for the second time

that evening; and thought, as many before her have thought, that, after all, human lots are less unequally distributed than appears. The same lesson must be learned universally; only some learn it earlier than others.

"Perhaps it is only that he is sick of having his own way," added Gerald, with a touch of bitterness in his turn. "One of Fortune's spoiled children. There are plenty."

"He was one, I know; but now—— he looks as if Fortune had only deluded him in the old days, and afterwards cast him out."

"Did you see his mother?"

"No; he was quite alone. No one took any notice of him. And he used to be so sociable, and so much liked! Well, I suppose we shall hear how it is, some time."

"Perhaps at Thorne, to-morrow," said Gerald.

Marjory sighed.

"I am half afraid to go to Thorne! It has been like an earthly Paradise in my mind all these years, and now—what changes shall I find!"

"I question whether there be any such thing as an earthly Paradise," said Gerald,

with his dreamy smile. "As to changes, there is nothing for it but to face them, making up one's mind to the worst."

"That is a gloomy doctrine, Gerald."

"No, not necessarily. There are worse things than change! Men and women can bear a great deal if they resolve not to give way."

The entrance of the little maid with supper, disturbed the colloquy. Marjory raised a corner of the blind, and looked out, cooling her burning cheek against the pane. It was a still night; not dark even yet; the cathedral, with its fretted tower, rose gray against the cloudless sky. Beyond, one large star shone serenely with steady light. It recalled to her the star which she had seen from her little bed at Thorne, on that first evening when she had awakened to see Bellhouse sitting in the window. The scent of the cigar stole back to her, the song of the thrush, the bright young voice coming up from the path below. Then she remembered how, later, she had watched Bellhouse kneeling by the chintz arm-chair; how from Bellhouse's prayers had sprung her own resolution to pray for Mr. Hugh. That resolution had been faithfully kept; though,

for many years now, mechanically. "O Almighty God, bless Mr. Hugh, and make him good!" She had never forgotten or altered the childish petition; still, as a fixed habit, she repeated it every night before she lay down in her bed—every night for eight years! and yet, was the face that she had seen to-night the face of one whom God had blessed? Was it the face of one whom God had made good? Could it be that God had overlooked the little prayer, or had refused to hear it?

"Do you please to want anything more, miss?" said Priscilla's voice.

The little maid was surveying the table, anxious to know if any requisite for the simple supper were forgotten. Marjory satisfied her mind upon this point, and then took her place opposite Gerald.

Gerald was unusually agreeable to-night. The music, or something else, had excited him, and made him more lively and less silent. Marjory found him so entertaining a companion, that she was soon, despite herself, restored to her usual spirits. They discussed the concert, the music, the people; all but Lina. Gerald did not seem inclined to talk about Lina. This Marjory observed

with some surprise; but she supposed that his admiration had been simply an artist's instinctive homage to beauty; the face had charmed him, but, without further knowledge, he felt no particular interest in the person.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"They are all gone into the world of light,
And I alone sit lingering here!
Their very memory is fair and bright,
And my sad thoughts doth clear.

* * * *

"Dear, beauteous death, the jewel of the just!
Shining nowhere but in the dark;
What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust,
Could man outlook that mark!

* * * *

"If a star were confined into a tomb,
Her captive flames must needs burn there;
But, when the hand that locked her up gives room,
She'll shine through all the sphere."

Henry Vaughan.

The afternoon sun was slanting upon the many-tinted beds below the windows of the old nursery at Thorne. Sweet perfumes, curiously blended, floated upward, as of yore, into the room where little Marjory had rested. Flowers of by-gone times—clove-carnations, wall-flowers, and jonquils, lent their odours to the harmonious compound.

The best days of the syringa were over; but sweetness came from it still;—and very sweet also was the jessamine, which clustered round the windows. The roses were in fullest bloom, a galaxy of beauty—from the noisettes upon the walls, to the ancient standards bordering the paths. Among the blossoms bees hummed drowsily, returning with plenteous store to their old holes; wood-pigeons in the shrubbery were cooing, cooing, with the soft melancholy of yore; a great white cat stretched herself on the grass, lazily basking in the sunshine; beyond, the slopes of the park lay in alternate light and shadow beneath the grand trees which Marjory remembered. The same atmosphere of peace, of radiant calm, which had characterized Thorne in other days, pervaded it still. The old flower-garden looked just as Marjory had seen it on many and many an afternoon of that pleasant month which lived in her memory as a month in Eden.

An elderly woman was going to and fro among the flowers, inspecting with careful tenderness one after another of the old favourites, stooping now and then to remove a withered spray, or to collect the fallen rose-leaves, with which she was filling the basket

on her arm. Her face was pale and grave, with a chastened expression, telling of a time when deep furrows had been ploughed upon the quiet brow. Of the same time also told her hair, beneath her plain white cap, plentifully mixed with gray; there had been no gray at all in it when Marjory was at Thorne. But her eyes were still bright and keen; as yet no dimness shadowed them, despite their many tears. She was bending to gather a fragrant blossom from Lady Thorne's favourite root of jonquils, when through the open glass-door behind her came a rubicund damsel, with a good-natured face, strong arms, and chestnut hair,—a coarse copy of the wavy locks which, eight years before, had crowned Jessie's graceful head.

"Aunt," said this damsel, "here's a young lady, asking for you. Where be I to show her?"

"Where *am* I to show her, my dear. You mind your grammar, Kitty! specially when you open the door to ladies. Did the young lady give a name, my dear?"

"Lor, aunt! here she be a-coming!" ejaculated Kitty, forgetting her grammar a second time in her surprise at the spectacle of Marjory coming straight on, as though

she knew the place, through the darkened drawing-room.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! The doors were open, and I couldn't help coming. I knew that there was no one here but you," cried Marjory, as Bellhouse, basket on arm, turned inquiringly from the jonquils.

"You must please excuse me, ma'am," said she, with an old-fashioned reverence; "I have some recollection of your face; but I do not know your name."

"I am Marjory,—Marjory Stanhope. I was here eight years ago: don't you remember? Lady Thorne found me in the park, and brought me home, and I slept in the old nursery, in Miss Evie's bed."

"Yes, sure, so you did! I beg your pardon, ma'am, for not knowing you. Little Miss Stanhope! a little dear she was, too!—Remember? of course I do. You're heartily welcome, ma'am; and, now I look at you, I can see exactly the same face—blue eyes and all. Ah, Miss Stanhope! times are changed since you were here!"

At the first glimpse of recognition, eager Marjory had seized the old woman's hand; and now she could not refrain from kissing the grave, pale face—graver and paler than of yore.

"Dear Bellhouse, I am so longing to hear all about it, if you would not feel it too painful. May I stay and have a little talk with you?"

"May you! I should be vexed indeed, ma'am, if you hurried away just as you had come. I hope you'll stay as long as ever it is convenient. I have liberty to receive my friends—excuse me, ma'am, for applying such a name to you—and it will be real comfort to have a talk with you. For you knew her ladyship—and loved her—yes, that I'm sure of, child as you were."

"Indeed, I did," said Marjory, her eyes filling: "She has been a sacred memory to me all these eight years. May we sit down on this green seat, Bellhouse? I remember it so well. I spent such happy hours here, and the flowers and their scents seem like old friends."

"You've a faithful heart, ma'am; I always thought it of you, and now I see it. Yes, please to sit down; and, if you'll condescend to allow it, I'll sit by you. But you've never come alone, ma'am?—you have not a friend, I hope, waiting all this time outside?"

"No, my brother, who brought me from Alton, is gone to sketch in the park; and he

will not care how long he is left alone. I was to join him if I could not see you; but, as it is, he will call for me here."

"I remember how you talked of your brother, ma'am—and the letters you used to write to him. I can see you now—a funny, old-fashioned little thing! scribbling away as fast as ever the pen would go. I used to tell you you would spoil your hand, I remember. But, ma'am, if I may ask, how is it that you are here?"

Marjory briefly explained her residence at Alton, and related how her first anxiety had been for tidings of Thorne.

"We drove out in an open fly, and I made the driver put us down in the lane, almost in the very place where I stood on that burning day, and watched Jessie in the plantation."

"You watched Jessie, my dear?"

Marjory started and coloured. What promise had she made to Jessie, eight years ago? When she looked back in the light of maturer experience, she saw in that promise something which had escaped the little child.

"Jessie used to gather burdocks there for Lady Thorne. I hunted out all the old places, Bellhouse, so far as I could. We went

through the white gate to the brook, and over the little bridge, and then to the lodge to ask a few questions before I dared to come up to the house."

"And they told you at the lodge, ma'am, how it was?"

"They told me that—that dear Lady Thorne was dead, and that you were here alone, with one or two servants. I had feared that there might be some changes; but it was a shock to hear of this. I dared not ask anything more. I thought I would rather hear all from you, if you would tell me."

"It is a real pleasure to me to see you, Miss Stanhope! To be sure, the sight brings back old times; but so does many another thing; I am used to the pain of that. Well, my dear! it is four years now I have lived here alone. I am very contented and comfortable; and Kitty, my niece, who is the only maid-servant besides, is a very good girl, —though rough, from her mother, my sister, having married beneath her, and, dying young, the children were brought up by their father's sister, whose ways and manners were not quite what I have been accustomed to. But Kitty improves; and she is good-tempered, and don't mind being told; and I

don't despair of her in time. And then, ma'am, the gardener and his wife, they live too in the house; and they are very comfortable with me, and don't interfere in any way. So I have as much comfort as I can expect—far more than I could ever have believed in, if I had known what was coming upon me. But the Almighty settles things for us in a way we don't expect,—and far better than one fears, my dear! as, no doubt, you've found before now."

"And Lady Thorne has been dead four years?"

"Four years last month, ma'am, it is since my dear lady went home. That's what she called it. 'Bellhouse,' she said, on the last morning:—she was not altogether herself, but very calm, with the old gentle look on her:—'Bellhouse,' she says, 'I'm going home to Sir Archibald and the children, and you'll follow when you've arranged matters here.' She was partly wandering, ma'am, and thought, maybe, that she and I had been left in some strange place where there was business to be seen to. But I knew that it came quite natural to her to speak so of her death; for that was how she had long thought of it."

"It was a good bit later in the day, ma'am—just such an afternoon as that when she first brought you up to me in the old nursery—broiling hot, and we had all the windows open for air, and the jessamine smelled so sweet: I was sitting by her bed—she had been dozing a long while, when suddenly she opened her eyes, and said:—'Bellhouse,' she said, 'I have suffered a great deal. But it is over now.' Those were her last words, my dear."

"And, then, what happened?"

"She took hold of my hand, and clasped it, and turned on her side, and went off to sleep again, as peaceful as if she had been a child. And I sat and watched her for an hour or more, and never knew the moment when she died."

"How lonely you must have felt!"

"Afterwards, my dear, afterwards. Just at that time, Miss Stanhope, I felt only that I had learned a lesson."

"Please go on, it interests me so."

"I felt, ma'am, as never before, that our troubles are only for a time. It's a truth we're often hearing; I've read it in good books, I was taught it when I was a child, and I've heard it in sermons. And yet, if

you'll believe me, I never saw it right till then, as I sat by my lady's side. I'd been with her in all her griefs, ma'am; when she lost that beautiful baby, Miss Jane, and Master Archy, and Miss Evie,—and then Sir Archibald. I had seen her heart ready to break. And I had known how long life seemed to her then, and how hard she felt it to have to go on alone. Her dear heart sank, I knew, many a time, when she looked forward. 'Life's long day,' ma'am, as the hymn says! But now, there she lay, and what was it all? No more than a dream: past and gone and done with. 'I have suffered a great deal,' she said; 'but it is over now.' And of a sudden I saw clear, ma'am, that some day it will be over for us all, and then what will it matter?

"'When the shore is won at last,
Who will count the billows past?'"

murmured Marjory.

"It's how we have borne it, ma'am, will matter then, I take it. And I thought how my dear lady had borne it, how patient and quiet-like; trying to do the best she could, all the while, for other people. And it seemed to me that, now she had got through,

the Almighty would feel a pleasure in making up for all He had seen fit to lay on her! Ah, it is wonderful, ma'am, how all of a sudden, upon times, things come to us that we thought we had known for years! The Almighty opens a window, as it were; and the view comes unexpected."

Peace was in the woman's homely face as she spoke, triumphing over all pain of outward circumstance. Marjory saw it and marvelled, and meanwhile a voice within was saying:

"I could not bear a life like hers, or Lady Thorne's; I could not—I could not."

Then came an inward tremor as she remembered that she might yet be forced to bear one!

"Bellhouse," she said suddenly, "You have not mentioned Jessie."

Bellhouse paused before replying. Something rising in her throat seemed half to choke her for a moment.

"Then they said nothing of her, ma'am, at the lodge?"

"I did not ask," said Marjory, blaming her own impulsiveness. She feared, from the look in the mother's face, that Jessie too was dead.

"Jessie, ma'am—I have little to tell you of Jessie. She married. That is all I know."

Marjory looked her answer; she dared not speak; there was that in Bellhouse's manner which checked inquiry. But suddenly the unnatural calm broke down; tears welled from the patient eyes.

"I'll tell you, my dear—I'll tell you. You've a kind heart; you won't take advantage. There's them that are always on the watch for scandal, and in general I keep my own counsel. But you knew her before, and you were fond of her. She stayed on, ma'am, at the place where she went, with Miss Bulkley, at Ripley, near Bullingham."

"Bullingham!" repeated Marjory.

"A town in Hampshire, ma'am. Do you know the name?"

"A friend of mine, a Miss Peele, lived there."

"Did she indeed? But Ripley is seven miles out of the town, a country place like this. Miss Bulkley was an elderly lady, very kind; she lived with her brother."

"Mr. Bulkley! I remember him quite well. He came to Thorne. A very stout old gentleman, who travelled with two servants. He was very good to me."

"He was especial fond of children. When he visited here, quite as a young man, he made so much of the little dears in the nursery! His sister was just as kind, and a mighty friend of her ladyship's. She treated Jessie as a pet—too much, I fear, my dear! it was her beauty, you see, that bewitched every one; and she had a deal of liberty. But I knew that she would not do to be kept too straight; and the accounts of her were very good. By degrees I had got almost used to being without her; and I hoped she was settling down into a faithful and honoured servant—which was what I always desired. She came here once, with Miss Bulkley, on a visit; and I was very much pleased by all I saw of them together. And so things went on,—all right, as I thought, for more than two years and a half. Then, all of a sudden, one morning, came a blow."

Marjory's face grew pale, in sympathy with that of her companion. Bellhouse paused to glance half nervously over her shoulder; and went on with lowered voice:

"It was a letter, ma'am, from Miss Bulkley to her ladyship, to say that Jessie was gone, —no one knew where. She had disappeared either in the night, or very early, and they

could find no trace of her. All possible inquiries were being made, Miss Bulkley told us, and we should hear again when they knew more. That was all."

"Oh, Bellhouse! What did you do?"

"I took to my bed, ma'am. Her ladyship broke the news to me, as gentle and as tender! but it drove me well-nigh beside myself. 'Bellhouse,' says my lady, 'we must keep this quiet; we must say no word to any one till we hear again.' I saw the wisdom of that, ma'am; but contain myself I couldn't. All the strength fled out of me, as it were, in a minute. I went to my bed, and there I lay."

"Oh, how glad I am that it was not after Lady Thorne's death!"

"Oh, ma'am! if it had been, it must have killed me, or drove me mad! Words can't say, ma'am, what she was to me. She would come to my bed like an angel straight from the Almighty. He sent His comfort by her; and I lived on that, and nothing else, for two whole days and nights. The servants thought it was just illness, and her ladyship gave orders that no one was to disturb me more than needful. Well, ma'am, the third morning I had a letter. Oh, that letter! I

seemed to go mad with joy, just as I had done with sorrow. I jumped up, put on my clothes, and ran with it straight to her ladyship."

"Was it from Jessie?"

"Yes, from Jessie herself: only a note, but written in such spirits! It said that she was happily married; that she could tell me no more at present, because his friends would be angry if they knew of the marriage, —for he was a real gentleman. They were going abroad for a bit; and she would write again as soon as things were more settled. She begged me to get her ladyship to ask Miss Bulkley's forgiveness, and say that she would some day explain all. As for me, she said, she would more than make up for all I had ever suffered on her account. Just at the end came these words: 'Dear mother, —you see I told you true. I am a lady at last!'

"That was the letter, ma'am, signed 'Jessie Russell,' and enclosing a packet of photographs of herself in her wedding-dress. At first, as you'll understand, all I seemed able to think of was the knowledge that she was safe, and married respectable. There was the photograph, with my Jessie looking

so well and happy! and her wedding-ring quite plain. After all I had feared and fancied, it seemed too much joy!"

"And how glad Lady Thorne must have been too!"

"Well, ma'am, she was glad in a way; but yet she looked grave: and, as soon as the first surprise was over, I saw plenty of reason. First of all, the letter was so giddy and thoughtless—and the whole thing had been done in such a way, so underhand all through, and so ungrateful to Miss Bulkley. Oh, my dear, I shed many a tear of shame before the day was done! And then, ma'am, I felt uneasy again. I began to think that her husband must be a queer sort of man to manage things so! The more I thought, the worse it seemed; at last I had it all out with her ladyship. Then she told me that she had been uneasy from the first; only she did not like to damp my relief."

"And Jessie had never given any hint of her being engaged?"

"Never a word, ma'am; neither to me nor to Miss Bulkley. No one at Ripley had any notion of it: except that she used to go out for long walks alone, upon times, and

particular in the three months before she disappeared. But never a word was breathed to blemish her character; indeed, thank God, ma'am, I had a confidence that Jessie was too proud, if nothing else, for that! Her ladyship eased the way for me there, by herself giving out that Jessie was married, and gone abroad; and many a one came wishing me joy, and asking all manner of questions that I could not tell how to answer. And all the while my heart was aching, and pining for my Jessie, and wanting to know more about her, and what sort of person was her husband. And I could not help thinking, ma'am, how different all would have been if she had come to be married at Thorne, and how proud I should have felt of her! It was a sin in me, my dear, and the Almighty has punished it—but I had always a pride in Jessie. And I kept fancying how pretty she would have looked at her wedding in Thorne Church, and how kind my lady would have been, and what presents she would have had, and what a cake at the breakfast! and what a joyful day altogether—only I should have sorrowed, very like, to part with her—but still I should have felt myself selfish to begrudge her a home of her own. But now

I couldn't feel sure what her home would be; for what could one expect from a stolen marriage, and the husband too much of a coward to tell his friends, and all? However, I kept on hoping that things would turn out better when I knew more; and day after day I watched the post for another letter.—But, my dear, I never heard from Jessie again."

"Never again!"

"Never one word, ma'am."

She paused, looking up to the sky in the way that Marjory remembered.

"The Almighty knows where she is; that's my comfort. He made her; and He loved her better than I could; and very like, at this minute, she's safe with Him."

Then, more freely than before, the tears streamed, and for some minutes there was silence.

"How you have suffered!" breathed Marjory, softly, at last.

"Yes, my dear, yes. But——Well, there's no use to talk of it! You may fancy how it all was. Sometimes I feared my Jessie was ill, and felt half mad, thinking she might be wanting me to nurse her. Sometimes I thought she had grown ashamed of her old mother, and that her husband might even

have insisted on her giving me up. And yet I could not find in my heart to believe, with all her vanity, my Jessie would ever do that! And sometimes I thought she might be dead. That is what I am getting to feel well-nigh certain of, now."

"I wonder the suspense has not killed you."

"I kept a firm hold to the thought, 'The Almighty loves my Jessie better than I do.' I might have died, or worse, but for that."

"I suppose you do not expect much now?" said Marjory, under her breath.

"No, I made up my mind years ago, ma'am, to expect no more. Expecting only made me wretched. If my Jessie had been alive, and in her right mind, would she have stayed all these years from her mother? Wouldn't she have written, if only a few words, to ease my mind, if no more? I never can believe to the contrary; Jessie was never cruel. She was proud beyond everything, and foolish, and a bit selfish; but cruel she never was. Sometimes, indeed, ma'am," said Bellhouse, sighing heavily, while a painful anxiety came over her face like a cloud—"sometimes my mind misgives me lest perhaps—if she found she had a bad

husband—she might have been too proud to let me know, and so kept silence, and hidden herself. She might—she might; I could not answer for it! But I try to put the thought away; it hurts me too much:—I'd rather think she's safe with the Almighty.

"Wasn't it King Hezekiah, ma'am, that said 'Lord, I am oppressed! undertake for me!' That is my feeling, so strong! and I feel quite sure that He does undertake, as if I saw it with my eyes. And I know there will come a day when I shall see my Jessie again, and be with her and my dear lady for ever. I have prayed so much for her all my life; the Almighty would never forget those prayers:—no, it can only be that the right time is not come. When I see her, she'll tell me all about it; so I must just be patient, and wait as my lady waited."

Then Bellhouse was silent, and Marjory felt that she had herself no fitting words to say. But in place of the tears had come a hush and a peace, which imparted to the homely face a touch of the divine.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"The voices are gone, but I linger,
And silence is over all;
Where once there was music and laughter
Stands Death in the empty hall.

"There is only a dead rose lying,
Faded and crushed on the floor;
And a harp whose strings are broken,
That love will play no more."
W. W. S. (*Blackwood's Magazine*, July, 1879).

"And now," said Marjory, when Bellhouse had settled down into her first composure, "I want to ask you about Mr. Hugh Vivian."

"You don't mean to say, ma'am, that you've heard nothing all this time about the changes at Copelands?"

"What changes do you mean?" cried Marjory, flushing between mingled curiosity and dread.

"Well, to be sure! you were but a child, certainly, at the time; but it was the talk of the whole county, and I made sure that it would be in all the papers."

"But what was it? what happened?" repeated Marjory, breathless and still flushed.

"Well, ma'am, about a year after you left us—let me see," said Bellhouse, pausing to make inward calculations: "Yes, you left us eight years ago, and it is seven years since Mr. Vivian's death. Mr. Vivian died, ma'am, struck down in a moment, of heart-complaint; no one knew, before, that he had it. They telegraphed for Mr. Hugh, to Scotland, to his regiment; and of course we all thought that he would be master now. Poor fellow, he thought so himself, and never expected any blow worse than his sudden loss.

"And then, ma'am, it came upon us like a thunderbolt, that the family were ruined! The estate had been heavily—moggidged, I think they call it, for years and years, and would have to go clean away; and, besides that, were heavy debts, thousands and thousands of pounds. All the beautiful things had to be sold, ma'am: it would have broken your heart to see it,—for Copelands was quite a picture, I'm sure, inside and out. All the statues and the pictures and the plate; Mr. Brown,—our butler, he cried, ma'am, to think of the plate! and the beautiful furniture, old and new, and even the family jewels: and the carriages, and the horses, Mr. Hugh's chestnut, and all—every one had to go.

Her ladyship bought some of the plate, and a few favourite pictures, and gave them as a present to Mrs. Vivian. But she wouldn't take them, nor let Mr. Hugh; she said it was too painful. So then her ladyship left them to Mr. Hugh in her will; but they are still here: he is living in lodgings, poor young gentleman, and has no room for them."

"But, Bellhouse, how was it? The Vivians seemed so rich!"

"They did seem so, ma'am; but it turned out to be only seeming. I don't understand much about such things, but I have heard it was in this way. Mr. Vivian's grandfather and father were both very wild and extravagant, and lived very fast, far beyond what they could afford; and the grandfather married a great lady, and had to make a heavy settlement on her; and, at her death, what should she do but leave it away from the family? What with it all, the estate was moggidged long before our Mr. Vivian's time; and both he and Mrs. Vivian had been brought up very high, and to a fine way of living; and they were too proud, if nothing else, not to keep it up. And so things went on till they got past mending, and I have heard say that their only hope was for Mr.

Hugh to make a grand marriage, and bring back the family fortunes. But you see, ma'am, as it turned out, poor Mr. Vivian died when Mr. Hugh was not much more than one-and-twenty; and then it was all over."

"All over," repeated Marjory; "For this world, at any rate."

She sat with her hands clasped, her eyes fixed, gazing into vacancy—upon Copelands as she had seen it in that summer-day's drive, eight years ago: the stately mansion, with its terraces and gardens; the young soldier, reining in his horse, with that air of careless grace, and saying, with peculiar meaning, overlooking that fair vision—"There's no place like home!"

"And for the next world, oh, my dear!" said Bellhouse, answering Marjory's dreamy words: "If only that noble lady, Mrs. Vivian, had been like her ladyship! Her ladyship's heart seemed of late years to be as much in Heaven as here; but Mrs. Vivian was otherwise. She had always been one of the great ones of this world; and when that went, all went. All but Mr. Hugh: and the sight of him broke her heart."

"How did he bear it?"

"Ma'am," said Bellhouse, "we must speak always tenderly of the dead; and yet—I do blame his parents. Yes; I've thought, many and many a time, how cruel it seemed to bring up that poor young fellow so, with every luxury, every one bowing before him: why, ma'am, he was for all the world like a young prince at Copelands! It does seem downright cruel to have reared him in that manner, and not so much as had him taught any honest way of earning his bread, when ruin was staring them in the face,—and as for him, certain sure to come upon him!—unless so be that he had died, or made, as I said, a great marriage. And that was but a chance, ma'am, as all might know; and Mr. Hugh was not one to be forced in marriage, neither. He was a spoiled boy as ever lived, poor fellow! I don't believe it had ever entered into his head, till his father died, that anything could thwart him! And then—why, then, everything came upon him all at once."

"Did you see him at the time?"

"Mrs. Vivian sent for her ladyship, and I went with her; we were there the first part of the sale. Mrs. Vivian had hoped to leave Copelands sooner; but she was too ill; and

the sale could not be put off. It had begun two days before she could get away. She, poor lady ! kept herself close, as far as possible from the noise and confusion; but poor Mr. Hugh could not hide himself so. He had to be in the thick of all."

"How terrible it must have been to him !"

"My heart bled for him, ma'am, indeed. There he was—obliged to see all the folk that came crowding up the terraces,—some only to stare and gossip, and abuse the family's extravagance; for you know, ma'am, Mr. and Mrs. Vivian were always too high to be much of favourites in the neighbourhood. And others came just to haggle and bargain, and get more than their money's worth—brokers, tradespeople, and such like. And there they all were, examining and chaffering, and making their coarse remarks about the beautiful old things—them that he loved most, poor young gentleman, as well as the rest. Those were the vulgar sort; but there were others; perhaps harder for him to see. The gentry, ma'am, came flocking: the Earl from Fairlegh, and Sir Thomas Bohun, and Lord Colquhoun, one or more from well-nigh all the great families round about: for there were pictures, and old china, and valuable

things of every description to tempt them. And besides those came many that Mrs. Vivian had looked down on, and slighted, because they were not quite in her set, or from no better reason; people that Mr. Hugh had been brought up to despise and make quiet fun of at home: you see, ma'am, I knew all the ins and outs, from being so long at Thorne. And some of them had always been glad to pick up any story against the family; and some had been accustomed to toady them, and would have done anything in the world to get an invitation from Mrs. Vivian; or even, I do believe, one of them grand bows of hers! And Mr. Hugh, he knew all about it; and yet there he had to be and see them now, coming to gaze and finger and traffic with the rest. I stood behind a pillar, ma'am, in the great hall, and watched him as long as I could bear it. You remember Mr. Hugh, my dear?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then you know what a bright look he had in his face, and how he seemed always ready to make fun, and throw out a laughing word, no matter to whom; and yet he was high too, in his way, and always the

master:—more of a king than a master, indeed, with the people about the place. Well, my dear, the very last time that I had seen him, he had that look and that manner; when I saw him now, a little backward from the crowd, the change seemed to strike me through! He stood very straight, ma'am, like a young soldier born; and his head a bit higher than usual, very still, and very proud. But the colour was all gone out of his face; he was as pale as, with that brown skin of his, he could be; and his mouth was set in a way which I had never seen before —stern and resolute, as it were, as if he had made up his mind to battle through without showing an inch of what he felt. But his eyes—you'll remember he had fine dark eyes —they were brimful of agony. I shall never forget that look, ma'am! As I turned away —for I could not bear it long—I thought: 'But for his mother, he would shoot himself.' Yes, and often I have thought since, that so it would have been—in that first freshness of his troubles—but for her."

"I recollect how fond he was of her."

"More than fond, ma'am; he was wrapped up in her: and good to her past everything! As soon as she could be moved, she came to

Thorne; and he rode over every night from Copelands: and I never saw son more devoted. When he was with her, his only thought seemed to be how he could shield and comfort her; and she got to lean on him as if she had been a child. She might have stayed at Thorne, poor lady, as long as ever she had a mind; but all her cry was to get away, away to some strange place. Ah, she was proud, ma'am, Mrs. Vivian! She could not bear the pity and the gossip, and the tongues so busy with her name; and she would rather die than live on charity—even my lady's. She was set from the first on hiding herself, where no one knew her. But the difficulty was, where to go; for they had no money, except a little that was over from the sale of poor Mr. Hugh's place in the army. I don't rightly understand these things, ma'am; but no doubt you can tell my meaning."

"The sale of his commission, you must mean. But how could he live if he left the army?"

"He could not have lived *in* it, ma'am; his habits had been too expensive: it would have been very hard to alter them, and break off all his old connections. Then he wanted

to make a home for his mother; and, above all, the money was downright necessary. Some even of that had to go towards the debts."

"And what did they do?"

"It was a hard case, ma'am, and puzzling. My dear lady did her best in every way, and applied to friends for advice; and at last help came through Mr. Bulkley—Mr. Bulkley of Ripley, my poor Jessie's master, my dear. He was always a gentleman for helping all that needed it; and, as it happened, he was a large shareholder in a bank at Bullingham, and so was able to get a clerkship there for Mr. Hugh."

"But what a change!"

"Yes, ma'am, indeed. No one I heard speak of it but said, What a pity! And yet it was the only thing at the time; for, you see, there had been a sad fault in his education. His father and mother, they had built upon chance, so to speak:—may the Almighty forgive me, if I judge them! They were that proud of Mr. Hugh, they would not have wondered if he had married a princess! and he, poor young gentleman, had been allowed to do pretty much as he liked, and learn or not learn, as the fancy took him.

Else, if only he could have passed a hard examination, there was many a post to be got for him: so I understood. But that he never could, without a deal of study—for which there was no time, nor money; so he had just to take what he could get. Poor fellow, he accepted the clerkship; and they went off to Bullingham."

Here Bellhouse relapsed into a reverie, and Marjory sat intent upon a thought which had suddenly struck her. She was recalling a conversation with Lina, more than a year before,—Lina's mention of a clerk in her father's bank—"a black sheep," whose name was Hugh Vivian. That name had seemed a mere coincidence, then, both to Marjory and her friend; but now it had a new significance. . . . What had he done to cause that look which she remembered, on Lina's classical face?

"You heard of him sometimes, I suppose?"

"Now and then, my dear,—only very rarely. Mrs. Vivian, she was too broken-hearted, I take it, for writing. Any way, there came only two or three short notes from her to my lady; and Mr. Hugh—well, he wrote once or twice, but only that. Miss Bulkley, she would mention them sometimes; but she

knew little of them. She would have been glad, she said, to have them often at Ripley; but they would not come. That was Mrs. Vivian's doing, ma'am, you may be sure. I take it she could not bear to visit, in her altered position:—she that had always been the first, or made much of with the first, in all companies hitherto. It would have been gall to her to think that Miss Bulkley invited her from pity, as it were; and, as for poor young Mr. Hugh, all his wish was just to pleasure her! So we heard scarce anything about them, and in a while their name seemed to have faded out of the county: but yet the news did come like a shock, when Mrs. Vivian died."

"She died too, then! How long ago?"

"Oh, a long time, ma'am — two or three months before my Jessie was married. Some inward disease had worked in her many years; and her trouble and poverty quickened it, and brought it to light. The doctors could do nothing,—such doctors as she could afford, at least, poor lady. She just languished away, and died in their lodgings at Bullingham."

"And he was left alone?"

"Yes, poor young gentleman. Oh, he has

suffered enough to break his heart twice over, ma'am! After his ma was dead, he threw up his situation, and went away—no one knew where. It was just after that, my trouble began about Jessie; and I had no anxiety to spare for him, or for anything outside my daily duties. All I know is, that he was travelling for many a long day; but, poor fellow, he has come back now, into our country. Very like, ma'am, you will see him before long; for he lives at Alton."

"I believe I did see him—last night," was all that Marjory answered. Many thoughts were busy in her mind.

"Did you indeed, ma'am? I wonder you recognised him; for he is changed. His troubles have set their mark on him; and I fear he takes them hard. He comes, upon times, to see me; he doesn't say much, but he is always kind, and thoughtful of my comfort. He remembers my old tastes, ma'am, and brings me a little present to suit them, now and again. But there's something about him vexes me a good bit," said Bellhouse, shaking her head.

"What is it?"

"I can't rightly explain, ma'am: a kind of scornfulness, and a look on his coun-

tenance, if I speak of the Almighty or of Heaven; and them being all I have to hope for now, are so much in my heart that, like enough, they're more on my lips than I know of. Well! I trust he'll be brought round, if he's going wrong, and shown the silver lining to his troubles. I pray it, and that's all I can do for him, poor fellow," said Bellhouse, sighing.

"How does he live now? Is he in a bank again?"

"No, ma'am, he's quartermaster, I think they call it, to the militia; and I've heard that he gets something besides, by writing for magazines and newspapers: but he has to pinch and contrive, I take it, compared to the past, to live even in the way he does. He has a lodging, ma'am, he tells me, in High Street,—two little rooms."

"And who lives at Copelands, now?"

"Oh, my dear, 'tis piteous to see Copelands! As for me, I don't desire ever to set eyes on it again. That gentleman the poor squire had moggidged it to, was one who sets no store by old places. He'd never had any of his own, I suppose, and so knew nothing of that kind of feeling. Why, I heard him, myself, say at the sale, looking round about

him: 'The sooner every one of these useless old houses is swept away, the better for England!' What could you expect, ma'am, from such a sentiment? He sold it to some carpet-weaving company, who fancied it from its nearness to the river; and now the house is turned into a factory.

"Many say they would not have known the place; and I don't wonder; for there's a great tall chimney put up, that disfigures it sadly; we can see it, ma'am, from one part of our park. Then most of the gardens are done away with, and the terraces are levelled; and there's a great yard all round: and the stables are turned into out-houses for the factory. Inside, great numbers of rooms are pulled down, and thrown into one; and the whole place is full of machinery. They say, too, that the parish of Copelands is downright ruined by the quantity of bad characters who have come there to work. For my part, ma'am, I wish they'd alter the name; for the place is a different place altogether."

"But the beautiful old park! They could not alter that?"

"Oh, dear, yes, ma'am! In the parts near the house, there's a number of cottages;

ugly, upstart-looking places they are too, mostly of red brick; they have been put up for the hands—one now, one then, as they were wanted. And the rest is all sold, or let, to different parties. The trees are well-nigh all cut down and gone, and the land is parcelled off into fields. The new branch railway cuts right across, and now they're building a station. Poor Mr. Hugh—or Mr. Vivian, for so we call him now, he's been over there once, he told me. Once was enough, I should think, poor fellow!"

"It is too painful to dwell upon," said Marjory.

She did not wonder now that Mr. Hugh was changed. Her heart ached for him, and with him.

CHAPTER XXV.

"All are scattered now and fled,
Some are married, some are dead;
And when I ask, with throbs of pain,
'Ah! when shall they all meet again
As in the days long since gone by,
The ancient time-piece makes reply,—
'For ever—never!
Never—for ever!'

"Never here, for ever there,
Where all parting, pain, and care,
And death, and time shall disappear,—
For ever there, but never here!
The horologe of Eternity
Sayeth this incessantly,—
'For ever—never!
Never—for ever!'"—*Longfellow.*

"I HAVE never asked you how Thorne was left," said Marjory, suddenly; "How is it that no one lives here?"

"Perhaps I have told you, ma'am, in old times, that Sir Archibald was the last of his family. They were an old Saxon family, as I've always been informed; and so no wonder they have died out at last. But Sir Archibald put it in his will, that at my lady's death all should go to a little Master Craw-

ford, whose grandfather had been his bosom-friend. Master Crawford is grown up now, and in Parliament, and very clever, with no taste for country life. However, he's not like that person who got Copelands; he has a reverence for old days and old houses. He keeps on the old steward, and we two or three servants, to take care of the place. What his future plans may be, I don't know; he is quite young as yet, and upon times I fancy that some day he'll be marrying, and bringing down a young wife. But that I leave."

"And perhaps, after all, you might find her a comfort?"

"I don't know, ma'am—I can't say. It would seem strange to see any one in my dear lady's place. Though, as to that, I should not be bound to stay; for her ladyship left me a small independence: with care, I could manage, if needs were. So far I've been laying it by regular, against a rainy day. Except a few little legacies like that, all her ladyship's money went to a distant cousin of her own, who was poor. She was very just, and had strong feelings of kith and kin; else poor young Mr. Vivian might be the better."

"And now there is only one thing I have to ask: What has become of the Hammonds?"

"Martha Hammond, my dear, that you and your poor aunt and uncle lodged with? Well, her mother at the south lodge died six years ago, and after that she had no tie to these parts; and Hammond had a good offer in the tailoring line from a friend who had emigrated; so off they all went to Australia; and I understand they are doing very well."

Marjory's curiosity was now satisfied, so far as lay in Bellhouse's power. She sat still, in a kind of maze, thinking everything over, comparing the Thorne of her childhood with that of the present. Once it had been the little old lady's lot to see all the same, yet different; now her own turn had come. A strange melancholy stole over her; the glow which had transfigured all life since her arrival at Alton, faded into twilight. She saw Time as a relentless figure, the future like a scroll in his hand, unfolding ever more and more—dark places no less than bright ones. He could never pause, nor allow his subjects to pause, in that ever-changing monotony—a monotony which made the past prophetic of the present.

"There's something very strange in life, Bellhouse!" she said; "But some people are happy in spite of all? Though there are so many changes and chances, we are helped through, if we trust?"

Bellhouse turned her grave pale face, and looked gently at the eager girl, so young, so inexperienced, taking life, as it were, by hearsay. The blue eyes met her older ones with a questioning glance that trembled on the edge of tears. What was in the girl's mind, she wondered? She paused, and pondered before answering.

"Yes, my dear," she said tenderly, at last —"yes, we are helped; and the help of the Almighty is wonderful. But it must come in His own way."

Marjory was satisfied. Here was the evidence of one who had passed through some of earth's fiercest storms; but the closing sentence escaped her. She had not yet realised—who has, at eighteen?—how vast a difference may lie between God's way and man's way.

"I'm so glad you came, ma'am," said Bellhouse, after a pause. "It has done me a power of good! The more I look at you, the better I remember you; you seem just

the same to me now as when you were a little girl, playing about here. Poor Mr. Vivian—Mr. Hugh that was—I remember his saying: 'If that child grows up as blue as her eyes, Bellhouse, she'll be a noted character!' Poor young gentleman! he was always fond of his joke."

"He was very kind to me, I remember. I wish I could help him! Well, Gerald will be coming for me soon; but, first, may I have one look at the dear old room, and Miss Evie's little bed?"

"To be sure, ma'am! of course you may. Come along in with me, and you shall go all over the house, if you like. I take a pride, my dear, in keeping it just as it used to be, and such as will satisfy her ladyship, if she can see it still. How pleased she would have been to-day! she had such a fancy for you, my dear. You mustn't go yet awhile; you must have some tea to refresh you before your walk—and your brother too, ma'am, if he will excuse the liberty."

As Bellhouse spoke, they were passing through the darkened drawing-room. There was the piano; the harp upon which Mrs. Vivian had played; the portfolio of engravings which Lady Thorne had opened for

Marjory; the chair in which the little old lady had sat, netting serenely at the shawl for her old woman. The old scent of rose-leaves pervaded the room; the furniture was swathed in holland covers,—otherwise it might have been but yesterday that the scenes in Marjory's memory had passed. Silently the girl followed across the hall, up the oak staircase, and along the passages, in a pilgrimage through the house. The chintz arm-chair was still standing in the deep-seated window of the old nursery; the paper was bright as of yore, with the wondrous birds and roses, so greatly admired by the child. Figures long vanished flitted before Marjory's eyes, as she trod the familiar floors. She heard voices speaking once again, each in its own tone. The charm which Thorne had ever possessed for her was magically strengthened; she felt an unaccountable love for the place, a clinging to it as though it were her home.

"I hope you will never leave Thorne, Bellhouse. It would almost break your heart!"

"I can't answer for that, ma'am. If the Almighty had meant my heart to break, it would have broken years ago. But it would

be a sore wrench, my dear, certainly. I can't fancy living, to be called life, anywhere else!"

"It will never be, I feel sure; forgive me for thinking of it!" cried Marjory in her impulsive way. Then they returned downstairs, and reached the hall just as Gerald was ringing at the door.

Now Marjory, in pride and pleasure, had to introduce Bellhouse to Gerald, and Gerald to the land of her dreams.

"I have heard a great deal about you, and about this place," he said to the old servant: "I feel as though I had come into the middle of a story-book!"

"And I am sure it is a great honour, sir, to see you here," said Bellhouse, with her old-fashioned reverence; "and her ladyship would be glad to welcome you, if she were here at this moment."

With these mutual civilities, Bellhouse and the young man were speedily excellent friends; and Bellhouse, as Marjory perceived, was deeply impressed by his sketch from a knoll in the park.

Here, as a background, rose the west end of the church, and a few of the rustic gravestones; while in the foreground was one of

the grand old trees, encompassed by divers forms of life. Among the boughs sat a squirrel, discussing an imaginary acorn; a thrush, straining his throat in song, was perched high in leafy solitude; the bright eyes of a field-mouse peeped from the moss which clothed the foot of the trunk. Here also, in the chequered shade, clustered grasses and wild flowers; the tiny pimpernel, with its upturned face, buttercups, and a root of sturdy foxglove; large ferns, spreading wide and feathery, dandelion clocks and clover, growing all together in a colony, as every countryman and woman has seen them many a time, in just such another place.

Bellhouse, country born and bred, marked the fidelity of each detail; and at the same time instinctively felt the power of the atmosphere of ideality which Marjory had learned to recognise as a characteristic of Gerald's work. Half unconsciously to himself, that atmosphere glowed and widened; emblems flowed naturally from his pencil, lurking ready to be searched out and studied. Even here, in this faithful copy of facts, that emblematic spirit was present. Life and material nature in the foreground; in the background the old end of the church, and the silent graves.

Above the graves a bird was soaring, away—whither? "Whither?" was the thought suggested by the mere sight of that soaring bird.

"It's a most beautiful picture, sir," said Bellhouse.

"If every one were as easily satisfied, I should soon win my fortune, shouldn't I?" said Gerald, with that melancholy smile which Marjory longed to brighten. But Bellhouse did not understand; she only looked at him, with pleased wonder in her homely eyes.

"I'll go and see about some tea now, sir," she said, "if Miss Stanhope will please to take you round the flower-garden. I dare say she will like to show you the old places."

So—Marjory with the feeling of a dream fulfilled—the brother and sister went off together; while Bellhouse, glad, and even excited, summoned Kitty to spread a snowy cloth on a small table in the old library. Afterwards she waited upon them, while they regaled themselves with Thorne cream, bread and butter, and great white raspberries lying on cool green leaves. The sky was already tinged with crimson when they started on their homeward walk; Marjory begging Bell-

house to visit her sometimes in their Alton lodgings.

"Thank you, ma'am, it's but seldom I go into the town," replied Bellhouse in an under-tone; "I get troubled—the streets are so full of unknown faces, and thoughts come to me of my Jessie dying among strangers."

As the brother and sister walked away over the smooth park slopes, Marjory, looking back, found her view impeded by a mist of tears. They passed through the churchyard—that fair and peaceful place, which had taken the little child's fancy, years ago. Marjory looked for the grave, new made no longer, which she remembered; but it was lost among a host of others, which had sprung up about it. They went down the wooden steps into the road, and so—gazed after from quiet cottages, by rustic eyes, as a curious novelty—into the shady lane of old.

Marjory said little all the way. They walked quietly home, entering the college-yard as the summer moon was rising above the tower of the cathedral.

As they crossed the little entrance hall the smiling maid came tripping to say that a gentleman had called during their absence.

"What was his name?" asked Marjory, listlessly.

"I don't know, miss. His card's in the parlour, however. He asked for Mr. Stanhope; but he inquired very particular, miss, about you—whether you had come for any length of time?—and when I told him you was come to live, he said, 'Oh, indeed!' surprised like."

Listless no longer, Marjory ran upstairs. The card lay on the table. She hurried to the moonlit panes, and read:

"Mr. Vivian."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Pray that He may prosper ever
Each endeavour,
When thine aim is good and true!"

Baron von Canitz.

Marjory sat long in her window that night, too restless to sleep. She had put out her candle, but moon and stars were shining; there was no darkness, though the deep voice from the cathedral had proclaimed twelve strokes above the silent town. Below, she could hear the river flowing on, the same by night as by day: the moonbeams lightened it with a stream of molten silver, tremulous in the tide. The drowsy cows on the opposite bank, one here, one there, rose like shadowy carvings from the grass. The chimneys and angles of the old house above the water showed in sharp outline against the sky. There was no breeze; and the city slumbered.

But Marjory's brain was busy. The sense of Life's mystery forced itself upon her to-night, as never before. She looked at the

stars, remembered that each was a world. Was Lady Thorne in one of them? was Mrs. Vivian, was Jessie, there? They had but changed their place in the universe, gone from one quarter to another. When would this separation, this silence, end? What was the meaning of all this change and disappointment? Vague, confused, rushing one upon another, eager questions coursed through the girlish mind.

And among them, constantly prominent, came the thought of Hugh Vivian. He had asked about her. He must have recognised her. She would meet him soon. But the conventionalities of life would come between them; she would not be able to speak out what was in her mind. Outside, cards, civilities, remarks on weather, calm voices, polished manners, polite smiles. Inside, the heart of humanity, passionate, suffering, sinful, striving—yet ever seeking concealment, except when now and then a poet, or an artist, or a mighty preacher, cries witness to the truth. Is not this also mystery?

So, in a medley, flowed her musings. Presently, from their midst, rose a defined imagination—an inspiration, it seemed to her. She had planned a story which she

would write; but here her plan appeared transfigured: the varied emotions which had possessed her during the day embodied themselves within it. Here would be an outlet for the multitude of thoughts which had arisen as a new world within her, since she arrived at Alton. She longed for morning, to begin at once; meanwhile, as at length she lay down in her bed, she thought of what this sudden conception might bring to Gerald. Had it been granted to her on purpose for him, she wondered? This was her last conscious question as her blue eyes closed.

When morning came, her faith in the answer was less confident! She remembered that she was only a young girl, immature, inexperienced: her heart misgave her when she thought of the great literary world. But, following at a humble distance great masters of old, she had resolved that, before she began her work, she would seek a blessing on it in the cathedral.

It was the twenty-eighth morning of the month; the first Psalm was—"Lord, remember David." The voices of the choristers rose clear and sweet into the heights; Marjory's heart rose with them.

"Lord, remember David, and all his trouble. How he sware unto the Lord, and vowed a vow unto the Almighty God of Jacob."

She thought of past ages, of the old Bible men and women; how unquestioningly they trusted in a supernatural Power, and were not disappointed. They had no idea of a stony First Cause, of immutable "laws of nature." Their faith was in a living God, a personal Being, Who knew each one of them by name, and ordered all their concerns.

The memory of their history rose freshly to her mind, as she looked up to where the calm figures sat enthroned. The sacred words echoed round them, borne by the music; the ineffable repose of their faces seemed to bear majestic witness to the truth of those words.

"There the Lord promised his blessing," chanted the choir. "The Lord that made heaven and earth, give thee blessing out of Sion."

All Marjory's self-depreciating feelings banished like a mist. It seemed to her that a promise had come direct from above; that already she was giving thanks for the fulfilment of her mission!

As she went swiftly away to the lodgings, to begin her work forthwith, many noticed the ardent girl, with the glow in her blue eyes, and the purpose in her step, and wondered of what she was thinking! But she herself was too much absorbed to notice any outward thing.

Gerald looked pleased, when he came home to their early dinner, to hear that the start was made. They chatted over the future, making plans; and Marjory, at least, forgot that her book was not already published, and on its way towards a second edition!

In the afternoon, as she was reading in the sitting-room, and at the same time knitting socks for Gerald, a double knock suddenly resounded upon the door below. Involuntarily she started and coloured, with an instinctive thought of Hugh Vivian; but a minute later she could have laughed at her own foolishness, as Priscilla's high-pitched tone announced, "Mrs. Carberry,"—and an elderly lady entered.

A most good-natured looking lady was she, with a kind, freckled face, and benevolent little eyes,—smartly attired, in a lace shawl and purple silk dress, with flowers in her

bonnet. Before Marjory's heightened colour had subsided, she was half-way in a long sentence of explanations, in which the name of Lina Peele conspicuously occurred. By degrees, Marjory comprehended that to Lina's acquaintance with her visitor the present attention was owing.

"I want to know if you will excuse ceremony, and come on Monday to a little croquet party at my house? I shall be so glad if you will! Just a few young friends to five o'clock tea. I have no young people of my own; but I am so very fond of them! I cannot feel happy unless they are frequently about me. Will your brother excuse ceremony, and come also? I have brought Mr. Carberry's card. He was too much engaged to accompany me, and he knew that he would not be likely to find your brother at this hour."

"Thank you, I'll tell Gerald. I shall hope to come, if he is able to take me," said Marjory, her eyes brightening at the notion.

"Oh, he will be able,—he must. I want to introduce you both to other pleasant young people. And you will meet your friend, Miss Peele. A sweet girl, is she not? A treasure

I consider her. The belle of Alton, and the flower of Alton. Quite. Is she not?"

"I can well believe it," said Marjory; "I know she was both at our school." Again came that prick of conscience at her own fickleness.

"School friendships are very interesting," proceeded Mrs. Carberry: "I had several of my own, and this gives me a pleasure in those of the young people. I assure you, you will find your friend fully appreciated in our circles. Every one looks up to her, and admires her. She is exceedingly useful also to dear Mr. Throckmorton. Beautiful services Mr. Throckmorton has, Miss Stanhope! It is wonderful how St. Philip's is improved. I attend it, although we live at a considerable distance, and Mr. Carberry remains firm to our parish church. But I feel the services of St. Philip's a spiritual treat. I cannot resist them."

"St. Philip's is certainly much altered. I knew it eight years ago."

"You must find changes indeed, then, if you recollect; but you do not look old enough to have many such long recollections."

"Oh, but I have!" cried Marjory; "Many and many."

"I should hardly have thought it," said Mrs. Carberry, with a good-natured smile. "Speaking of changes, I see Mr. Vivian's card. May I ask if he has called on your brother?"

"He called yesterday, while we were out."

"I am surprised indeed! He is generally so sadly unsociable! 'Mr. Vivian,' I say to him—on the rare occasions when we meet—'Mr. Vivian, I greatly wish that we could sometimes have the pleasure of welcoming you beneath our roof. We have a large circle of pleasing young friends, who would be charmed to make your acquaintance.' But no! he shuts himself up. Poor fellow! He has had sad troubles. That was why I alluded to him just now in connexion with change."

"Yes," said Marjory. She shrank instinctively from mentioning to Mrs. Carberry her former knowledge of Hugh.

"He comes of a very fine old county family. He was heir to a large property," said Mrs. Carberry, shaking her head, and speaking in an important under-tone: "His present position is much to be deplored. To

be sure, there is nothing disreputable in the duties of a quartermaster; but I regret that he did not choose a higher vocation. However, I make a point of mentioning his reverses to every stranger, that it may be known who and what he is. I have a great respect, Miss Stanhope, for old families, although I am not of one myself. You *are*, I understand?"

"I believe so," said Marjory, smiling, inwardly surprised that Lina should have thought it necessary to mention this circumstance!

"Yes, our dear young mutual friend told me that, as regarded ancient descent, there was no better blood than yours in the kingdom. You must excuse my familiarity, Miss Stanhope; but I have a real pleasure in good blood. I felt an affection for you, if you will permit me to say so, directly I saw your former pedigree in an old edition of Burke's 'Landed Gentry.' Poor Mr. Vivian—he is left out of the new editions! I am so truly glad, Miss Stanhope, to think that he has called on your brother. It is like turning over a new leaf; for I never knew him to do such a thing before. Your brother's looks must have caught his fancy; now I think of it, he stopped Mr. Carberry yesterday morning in

the street to ask the name of the new clerk in the bank ; and he called, it seems, in the afternoon."

"But why should Mr. Carberry be able to tell him ?" said Marjory, smiling again.

"Mr. Carberry, my dear Miss Stanhope ! Why, he knows every name in Alton. No stranger enters the town, but Mr. Carberry at once knows all about him. I can't say how it is, for he is not a prying man : but these lawyers are omniscient. My husband is the head of an old firm of solicitors, and that is how our acquaintance began with Mr. Vivian; they were the family lawyers, and, at the time of the troubles, Mr. Carberry saw a good deal of this poor young man. I am sure we should think it an honour to have him constantly with us, if he would only accept our invitations."

"He knows the Peeles, I suppose ?" said Marjory, inquiringly.

"Ah, you naughty, wicked girl ! I know what you are thinking of !" cried Mrs. Carberry, in a sudden burst, to Marjory's great surprise. She shook her finger at Marjory several times, with wonderful rapidity, as she spoke: "You are thinking how nice it would be if our dear young friend could console

him! Just the very idea which has repeatedly entered my own head! We must try to arrange it: now that you are come, I shall have an assistant in the matter. Your brother, too, will have some influence, since Mr. Vivian has taken a fancy to him. What a sweet wife she would make—charm away all his troubles! You naughty, match-making little girl!"

"Indeed, I never thought of such a thing," said Marjory, when she could get in a word. The idea was repulsive to her: she knew not why.

"Ah, well; never mind. Then you'll come on Monday? You and your brother:—as soon after five as possible. He will be disengaged then, I know. It is always a pleasure to me to enlarge the circle of my young friends. Good-bye."

She bowed and smiled, smiled and bowed, herself from the room; and Marjory was left to ponder.

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